# THE PARIAH

*By the Author of*

VICE VERSÂ

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# THE PARIAH

VOL. II.

# THE

# PARIAH

BY

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'A FALLEN IDOL' ETC.

*IN THREE VOLUMES*

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# THE PARIAH

## Book III.—*continued*

## CHAPTER III

### CARE AND THE HORSEMAN

> He knows a baseness in his blood
> At such strange war with something good;
> He cannot do the thing he would!
>
> *The Two Voices.*

It was the evening of the day which witnessed Allen's humiliating experience on Hussar, and, after lingering as long over dressing as he could—for he shrank from meeting his step-mother, who might for all he could tell have seen through Bob's disguise—he entered the drawing-room. He was always a little awed on these occasions; the softened light, the delicate fragrance of the azaleas, the luxury of the room were still new and strange to him, and produced a certain sense of being an intruder—the old painful feeling of inferiority to the others, who seemed to harmonise so well with their surroundings. They were all there: Ida and Miss Henderson playing 'Reversi' under a lamp by one of the windows; Margot acting as consulting milliner to Lettice, who was dressing a doll; Mrs. Chadwick in a low chair by the fire-place, where Chadwick stood in expansive ungainliness. 'Come in,' he cried with his great harsh laugh; 'don't stand there, looking like

a dog in a chapel. We've been hearing about you, master, your ears ought to have been tingling!'

'*Did* they tingle, Allen?' inquired Lettice with interest; 'is that why they're so red?'

'About me?' he replied to his father, giving himself up for denounced, but yet relieved, too, that Chadwick seemed far from angry.

'Ah, your mother' (he sometimes spoke of her in this manner) 'has been saying how well you were riding this afternoon when you passed the carriage.'

Allen looked at her half imploringly; but there was no malice or irony in her bland smile. Then he remembered that Bob was wearing a suit of about the same hue as his own, and, with the change of headgear, might easily pass a casual inspection.

'I shouldn't have known it was you, but for Hussar,' Lettice chimed in, 'and you never looked at us once, Allen!'

'Don't tease, Lettice,' said her mother; 'but another time, dear boy, I must just hint that even relations expect a bow in passing like that—you didn't think of it, and really, Joshua, I was quite pleased to see how well he sat his horse; you must have taken great pains with him!'

'I thought you were riding very well, Allen,' added Margot, quite sincerely, from an impulse—rare, it must be owned, with her—to conquer her own prejudices when he deserved credit. His father appeared to resent her remark for some reason.

'Rides well?' he said, glowering at her. 'Of course

he rides well! I wouldn't give much for him if he couldn't stick on a horse like Hussar by this time; but what *you* know about it, one way or the other, is beyond me, young lady!'

'I should have thought,' said Miss Chevening, with a touch of haughtiness, 'that it was easy enough to tell, even in a passing glimpse, whether a person has a good seat or not. I do claim so much.'

'Margot really has some right to an opinion, Joshua,' put in her mother. 'She rides extremely well herself; her father taught her when she was quite small, and, as long as I could afford it, she rode constantly.'

'Ah, well,' said Chadwick, 'Margot can do everything, it appears. I suppose the next thing will be that I shall have to get a lady's mount for her.'

'I never asked such a thing, that I am aware of,' said Mrs. Chadwick.

'Nor I,' added Margot, with hot cheeks.

'There—there—don't fly out!' he said, recovering his good humour. 'I don't say I mayn't do that—when I've time to look round me a bit and see where I am. There's the gong! Now, Allen, where's your manners? Come off that high horse of yours, and give your arm to your sister.'

So the four elder members of the family went in to dinner, at which Chadwick's pride and satisfaction in his son's equestrian promise broke out afresh from time to time, though in the form of a clumsy description of chaff. He drank to his coming successes in the hunting-

field, and there was a distinctly kindlier look in his rather bloodshot eyes when he looked at the young man.

It might be fancy, but Allen thought that another pair of eyes which met his across the table had a more friendly shine in their fringed hazel depths. He did not feel quite so much on sufferance as usual; he gathered confidence gradually, and courage too, and began to take another view of his conduct. He could have ridden the horse quite well, only he chose to lend it to Barchard. What harm was there in that? He would not do it again; to be sure, as his father would ride out as usual with him on the morrow, that would be unnecessary; he must learn to manage Hussar as soon as he can, and these compliments would be deserved some day.

That evening, as Chadwick walked round the billiard table, which had never been used in his father's life-time, he limped slightly, and from time to time gave vent to a sharp whistle. 'Only the gout, my boy,' he said; 'my poor father suffered from it all his life, and it's beginning to find me out at last. If I'm not better to-morrow, I'll have to give up riding for a bit, but that needn't make any difference to you, of course.'

'Oh, of course,' said Allen. But his heart sank again.

And the next day his father's foot was worse, and orders were given that Hussar alone was to be saddled for the morning ride. There was no escape. Allen went round to the stables, and looked at Hussar, who

eyed him with a backward glance of depreciatory distrust.

'You 'ad him out a goodish while yesterday, sir,' said Topham, 'but he ain't none the worse to-day. Don't ride him too much on the curb, if you'll excuse me tellin' of you, and he'll go like a lamb.'

Alas for Allen's good resolves! He walked straight down to the village, to a certain house with a large board above the door, 'Barchard, Plumber and Decorator.' There was a yard, with a shed or workshop behind, and outside this he found Bob lounging.

'Bob,' he said, with a pitiful attempt to seem careless, 'I shall be going out for a ride in half an hour. Could you be outside our gates by then, do you think?'

'Dunno about that,' said young Barchard, with the air of the Industrious Apprentice. 'I promised father I'd see to the stacking of some drain-pipes as are coming in.'

'Oh, go on!' exclaimed Allen, 'you told me you never did any work except when you cared. You can come, if you like, and, I say, Bob, I don't feel safe alone.'

'Well,' said Bob, 'I'm blowed if you *are* safe alone, and that's true enough; but if I come and see arter you, you'll have to pay me for loss o' time; that's on'y fair, you know.'

So an arrangement was arrived at; Allen being careful to walk Hussar down the drive and along the road until he saw Bob. He made a faint attempt to preserve something more of his self-respect than the

day before. 'I only want you just to tell me how to manage him,' he said. 'I shan't get off to-day.'

'Well, you've got your near sterrup wrong way, to start with,' said Bob. 'Woa, hoss! why, you're like a babby on him, you are—quiet then—he's wonderful fresh this morning; he'll be off with ye, if you don't give him his head a bit.'

'He's more likely to be off with me if I *do*!' said the unfortunate Allen.

'Either way,' was the unsympathetic reply, 'I can't be of much use to you on this sidewalk, so I'll be off home and see to those drain-pipes.'

'No; but look here, Bob,' protested Allen, 'I can't go back yet. I know I'm not equal to managing him. What the dickens am I to do if you go and leave me?'

'Do?' said Bob, with a grin. 'Get off and lead him; for, as sure as the Lord made small apples, if oyu don't get down of your own accord, he'll help you! Haw-haw! to think of you walking about all the morning with that great horse on your arm! Folks 'll laugh to see such doings!'

'It's very fine for you to chaff,' said Allen. 'You've been used to a horse—I haven't—what else am I to do?'

'What you did yesterday. I'll take him off your hands for an hour or so; I'll make time for that, to oblige you, and if I don't bring him back as quiet as a lamb, my name isn't Barchard. There, off you get, and take a little stroll through the wood and that, till you hear me whistling.'

'But you'll be known if you're seen!'

'What if I am? I've nought to be ashamed of. I shan't split on you, don't you be feared. And I tell you, without lying, it ain't safe for you to ride him yourself—no, that it ain't!'

So the transfer was effected, not only for that, but many subsequent mornings, for Chadwick's gout made it difficult for him to ride at first, and he seemed to lose any wish to do so even when he might. 'I don't care much for it,' he would say; 'I only rode as much as I did to put Allen in the way of it, and now that he's getting such a crack—how many miles did you go this morning, hey? That's right, get as much out of your horse as you can, he'll be none the worse for it!'

Every day Allen vowed either to overcome his fears and let Hussar do his worst, or to tell his father frankly that he was unable to ride the horse; and every day either course became more impossible. Chadwick only saw him mount and dismount occasionally, and Allen, being able to avoid any open exhibition of incapacity, aroused no suspicions of the real truth, and had to listen again and again to his father's boastful references to the admirable manner in which he had mounted his son, and the unexpected talent the boy had revealed as an equestrian.

Some of his hearers would receive these remarks with a covert smile, thinking, no doubt, that the amount of skill required to ride a well-bred hunter along country roads was not excessive enough to justify these paternal pæans; but Chadwick saw nothing. It is

possible, however, that they knew or suspected enough to make Chadwick's complacency seem even more ridiculous. Gorsecombe was not more incurious than the average English village in the affairs of its neighbours, and a plumber's son, however much above his business, could not ride a horse like Hussar in public long without giving rise to comment.

'That young chap of Barchard's come into a fortun' seemin'ly,' observed the postman one evening, as he refreshed himself after his labours in the kitchen of the Seven Stars.

'Lor', now, has he though?' said Mrs. Parkinjear; 'on'y to think o' that! 'Twill be a load off his poor father and mother's minds, for he's not one, by all I hear, to make one for himself. But who was it told ye, Posty?'

'Why, I've seen him about lately, c'reerin' along as grand as you please on a bright chestnut oss, as looks a thorough-bred 'un, and no mistake.'

'Barchard ain't got on'y that old oss as he drives in the cart,' said the corn-dealer, 'and he ain't no thoroughbred, I'll lay!'

'All I know is,' said the postman, 'as he's been ridin' a chestnut as Sir Everard hisself wouldn't be 'shamed to be seen on. He may ha' stole it for what I can say—he's rip enough.'

'Mister Chadwick up at Agra 'Ouse bought a ches'-nut 'unter for his son to ride, that's the on'y oss o' that colour I know of 'bout yere.'

'And that'll be the one,' said Mrs. Parkinjear, for him and that young Barchard was quite friendly

together, so my dear darter tells me, though, being a gentleman, he should ha' kep' his proper place with friends in his own rank accordin'—another mug, Postman?' (Here Mrs. Parkinjear, after much fumbling, produced the cellar keys from her pocket.) 'Run down, Cassandry, my dear, and draw it. Depend upon it, that young Barchard will have talked him into lendin' the hoss to cut a dash on, which, if my opinion was asked, I call bein' good-natured to them as little deserves such kindness.'

And some rumour must have reached Miss Momber's ears, for, having on one of her calls, which she made rather frequently, found Mrs. Chadwick alone, she began almost immediately: 'Now I do hope you'll not think me officious if I mention something I think it's right you should know!—it's about your son.'

'My step-son, I think you must mean; my son is away at school.'

'Exactly—your step-son. Well, there's a young fellow in the village, the son of Barchard the plumber, not a very steady young man, we fear, and that makes him all the more likely to be unsettled by being taken up by those superior to him. We can't help thinking it *such* a mistake for young Mr. Chadwick to lend this lad his horse, as he constantly does—we have seen him on it so many times!'

'Is that all, dear Miss Momber? I was afraid it was something very dreadful indeed. If Allen likes to be good-natured, I have no right in the world to prevent him, or to dictate to him about the friendships he forms,

though I may wish he showed better taste. I am only his step-mother, you know, and he pays no attention to me; you must speak to Mr. Chadwick about it; but thank you so much for thinking of telling me.'

That evening at dinner she said suddenly: 'Joshua, do you know there is something wrong with the pipes in the conservatory? I suppose there's somebody in the village who could come up and see what's wrong with them. Who was it that told me that the son of that man—Barchard, isn't it?—was so clever? Why, isn't he a friend of yours, Allen?'

'I know him to speak to,' said Allen.

'Oh, you needn't blush, you silly boy; one can have friends in every class of life; and, at all events, I should like this young Barchard to look at those pipes. Are you going to ride to-morrow?'

'I—I don't know,' said Allen; 'Hussar has to be shod in the morning.'

'Then you will go out in the afternoon, so I want you to look in at Barchard's as you go by, and tell the young man—not the father, I'm sure he is a stupid old thing—the young man to come up and see me at once. You won't forget?'

'I'll fetch him back with me.'

'Do,' said Mrs. Chadwick blandly, 'if you don't think it will take too long, because I am going to ask you to ride over to Closeborough for me as well to-morrow.'

'To Closeborough!' stammered Allen. She might as well ask him to ride to Khiva!

'Why not?' she said smiling. 'Surely that's nothing to such an accomplished horseman; it's about those ices for next Thursday. I want you to go to Tarrant's, and leave a message for me.'

'Perhaps you'd like him to bring the ices back in his pockets, eh, Allen?' said his father; 'but you'll have plenty of time to go there and back before dark, if you don't start till the afternoon. You can put up for half an hour at the Crown, you know. I dare say I shall think of some things I want you to order by-and-by.'

Allen lay awake that night, racking his brains to think how he might evade this difficulty; he was not fertile of resources, poor fellow, and was paralysed by this sudden emergency. He could only think of being taken conveniently ill, and an uneasy conscience made him apprehensive that this, taken in conjunction with Bob's engagement, might only provoke his father's suspicions.

So he decided that things must take their course. Perhaps Hussar might not be fit to go out next day; upon one point he was determined, he would not ride him to Closeborough alone. He had entered into an arrangement with Bob by which the time and place of meeting were signified by a scrap of paper placed under a particular stone outside the gates, and he did this as usual in the morning.

In the afternoon Hussar was brought round, tossing his head and pawing the gravel impatiently. His father came out to see him mount. 'Call at that ironmonger's in the Market Place,' he said, 'and ask 'em

why the deuce they're so long about those gardening tools, and stop at the saddler's and tell him he can send for that harness now. Remember your mother's commissions—young Barchard to come up at once (not that I see what use he'll be) and the ices—that's all.'

'He's riding devilish loose to-day,' he said to himself, as he watched him down the drive. 'Why don't he make Hussar go straight? Hasn't settled down in his saddle yet.'

'That wasn't Allen I heard just now?' said his wife, as he entered her sitting-room later in the afternoon, 'he—he hasn't started, surely!'

'Just this minute—why, did you want him to do anything else for you?—it's too late now.'

'I didn't think he would really go, Joshua!' she said; 'I meant to have told him that, if he would at all rather not——'

'He may just as well ride to Closeborough as anywhere else,' said her husband. 'What's the matter with you to-day, Selina? You seem put out about something!'

'I was only wondering,' she said, 'why that young Barchard does not come.'

'Oh, I told Allen to be sure and send him up—he won't forget; though why you send for a young fellow like that, I don't understand!'

He left his wife to her own meditations, which were just then none of the most agreeable. Careful as she was to hide it, she disliked this stepson of hers intensely; in secret she more than sympathised with

her daughters for having to accept him as a companion and equal. He affected her nerves; she regarded him as an eyesore, a glaring incongruity, and never saw him with her children without an inward revolt. She had tried to open her husband's eyes to his son's deficiencies, but, gently and cautiously as she insinuated her detraction, it made no way, and she was clever enough to see that she would only defeat her own aim by persisting. And soon she was able to hope that Allen would require no external aid in forfeiting his father's good opinion. Upon that afternoon when Hussar passed the carriage on the Closeborough Road, her eye at least had not been deceived for an instant, and Allen's subsequent demeanour had enabled her to guess pretty accurately what had passed. All that she need do was to wait, to make a few inquiries, to encourage her husband in his confidence as much as possible, and leave it to Time and Chance to bring about an exposure.

If it was really true that Allen never ventured to ride Hussar himself, and habitually transferred him to a humble acquaintance, there could be no doubt that this would injure him seriously in his father's opinion. But, except on that first occasion, she had no positive evidence, only her suspicions, to go upon, until Miss Momber supplied the necessary confirmation. How could she expose him best without seeming to do so intentionally? Might she not, by engaging him to ride at a time when he knew that his friend's services were otherwise secured, force him to

refuse in such a manner as to betray his deception? It was worth the trial; she had expected confidently that he would shuffle out of it at the last moment—but he had started after all. She smiled as she thought that, if he got this young Barchard to be his substitute this time, she would have ample means of discovering it, and allowing the fact to become clear in the most natural of ways. Then suddenly an ugly thought occurred to her. Suppose she had gone too far? Suppose he was on his guard, or had accidentally missed Barchard, or for any other reason was foolhardy enough to go to Closeborough alone? She had not reckoned this as possible before, but if it were? What chance would such a rider as Allen have upon a powerful hunter which he had not had the nerve to ride alone? If—if anything were to happen to him! Mrs. Chadwick was not strong-minded enough to regard such a possibility as this with equanimity; she had never intended it; she was frightened now to think that she might have rendered it possible. She took up a novel and tried to forget her anxiety by reading, till the fast fading light made it first difficult, then impossible, and she sat thinking, unable to summon up courage to ring for lights. At last she did so, and when the butler brought in the lamp, was astonished to find how late it was. 'Has Mr. Allen come back yet, Masterman?' she asked.

'Not to my knowledge, ma'am.'

'It—it's rather a dark evening, isn't it, Masterman?'

'It is ma'am, very dark; I don't know when I've

seen it come on so dark, indeed, for the time of year. Seems a sort of blight, like, ma'am.'

'It does seem so; where are the young ladies?'

'In the schoolroom, ma'am, with the governess. Miss Margot and Miss Lettice came in some time ago —been out walking, ma'am. Did you wish to see them?'

'No, no, don't disturb them. It is getting so late I must go up to dress soon; and, Masterman, as soon as Mr. Allen comes in from his ride let me know at once.'

'Very good, ma'am.' So Masterman withdrew, and Mrs. Chadwick again tried to absorb her thoughts in her author, and with no better success.

It was past the usual dinner hour when Mrs. Chadwick, who had gone up to her room, heard sounds outside of a strange voice in the hall below, a sort of subdued bustle, her husband's tones raised—was it in alarm? She listened with her hand on her heart till the sounds died away, then she rang violently.

Susan appeared with a white face: 'Oh, ma'am,' she began, 'I knew there'd be something 'appen! Topham said only this afternoon that Mr. Allen didn't ought to be allowed out alone on Hussar. And now it's come true—isn't it dreadful, mum?'

'Just tell me as quietly as you can what has happened,' said Mrs. Chadwick, controlling her voice by an effort; 'remember, I know nothing.'

'It was the men in the signal-box by the cutting between Gorsecombe and Closeborough; they saw a

horse with some one on him galloping along the line ; it was too dark to tell, but they thought he was running away. That was an hour ago, mum. And the station-master came up just now and asked to see master. They've found something on the line, mum—a body, I believe. Master went off to see about it. He was like some one out of his mind, mum!'

'Have you heard whether Barchard—young Barchard, the son—is—is at home or not?'

Susan stared, naturally failing to understand the relevancy of the question at such a time.

'Young Barchard, mum? Masterman was passing there a few minutes back, before this awful news come, mum, and, knowing you wanted some one to come about the hot-water pipes, he went in to speak about it.'

'Yes—yes,' gasped Mrs. Chadwick.

'Barchard said his son was only just in, mum, but he'd send him up as soon as he could.'

'That will do, Susan. Tell Miss Margot to come to me instantly.'

## CHAPTER IV

### DISMOUNTED

Il y a des gens destinés à être sots.

Il n'y a guère de poltrons qui connoissent toujours toute leur peur. *La Rochefoucauld.*

'WHAT are you looking back like that for, Lettie?' asked Margot, as they walked along the high road together on the afternoon which their mother was spending as we have already seen, 'Yarrow is ahead.'

'I know,' said Lettice, 'I was only thinking that perhaps Allen would come by.'

'And can't you be happy without seeing Allen for an hour or two?' said Margot, with a little accent of jealous reproach.

'Ah, but I've never seen him on Hussar, except just that one time, and he went by so fast then. I wish I could ride like Allen—he does ride well, Margot; you know you said so yourself. I shall ask Allen to let me ride Hussar some day. I rode that donkey (the nice one) at Littlehampton quite easily. Wouldn't you like to ride Hussar, Margot?'

'Very much, dear.'

'I'm sure he would let you if you asked him. Shall *I* ask him? I'm a regular pal of his now, Margot. I

didn't cotton to him at all, at first, you know, but he's awfully good natured.'

'Lettie, you will get to talk just like a little common girl soon—you don't know how ugly it sounds. I wish you wouldn't be quite so much with Allen.'

'He likes to have me with him. At least, I asked him if he minded once, and he said no.'

'I was thinking of *you*—you mustn't copy his expressions or his manners, darling, they are not pretty.'

'Oh, but I'm curing him of them, Margot. Haven't you noticed he hardly ever speaks with his mouth full now, and I've taught him no gentleman *ever* shoots bread pills. And I've heard *you* talk slang, Margot.'

'I'm not a pattern person, darling, but at least I'm a better example for you than he is. There, I don't want to run him down—he has his good points, but you mustn't borrow your expressions from him; you used to be so particular, Lettice!'

'I'm tired of being particular—it's better fun being the other thing.'

Margot laughed; she knew very well that her hint had told. 'Haven't you had enough of this tiresome road?' she said. 'Suppose we go back through the wood and across the field.'

'Right you are!' said Lettice cheerfully; 'I knew I'd catch you that time, Margot! That doesn't come from Allen at all—but Mr. Fanshawe, who's a clergyman. Just saying it the wrong side up can't be vulgar, you know. Why, it sounds twice as well as "you are right"!'

Margot wisely declined to contest this statement. 'Call Yarrow to heel,' she said, 'or he may do some mischief in these woods.'

They had entered the pine wood which bordered the road, and passed up the soft tan-coloured lane with moss-grown ruts. The bracken was springing up in little green croziers on the raised banks, the new growth on young fir trees spiced the air, cuckoos were calling from the distant fields, a solemn gloom reigned under the sad green branches.

'It's evening in here,' said Lettice, 'and I don't see Yarrow anywhere; listen, that's his bark, he's found something he likes—he always barks like that when he's pleased; let's go and see what it is.'

They struck through the wood obliquely, and presently saw the collie leaping and dancing delightedly around something unseen; he came bounding to them, barked, and ran off again, looking over his shoulder as an intimation that they were to follow.

'It isn't something, Margot, it's somebody,' whispered Lettice; 'and he is trying to make Yarrow be quiet and go away—why, it's Allen's voice!'

She ran forward, and Allen, seeing further concealment was useless, came out from behind the big pine trunk which, but for Yarrow's well-meant amiability, would have screened him effectually.

'Have you come back already?' asked Lettice innocently; 'how fast you must have ridden! Was it all right about the ices, Allen?'

'Oh, don't bother me,' he said roughly. 'I suppose

you'll go telling everybody where you've seen me now!'

Lettice drew herself up. 'I'm not a tell-tale,' she said, 'and I think you're very unkind.'

Here Margot joined them. 'You can't possibly have been over to Closeborough and returned already,' she said; 'it is quite eight miles from here. What has become of the horse, too?'

Embarrassment made him brutal. 'You mind your business,' he said, 'and I'll do the same.'

Margot's flexible lips curled in disgust. 'By all means,' she said; 'I have no curiosity in anything that concerns you. Come, Lettice, we will leave him.'

'No,' he cried, 'don't go yet. I—I don't know what it is I do say, or I should never speak that way—to you. If I was to tell you, you'd see how it was.'

'Run on, Lettice, and wait by the stile at the edge of the wood till I come. Now, Allen,' she continued presently, 'what is all this mystery about? Have you had a fall from your horse? What of it? There's no disgrace in that. Is Hussar lamed?'

'No,' he said, 'I haven't had a fall. I wish I had. Hussar's right enough. If I thought you'd keep it a secret——'

'I shall certainly not promise till I know what it is; but I don't wish to hear it unless you would rather tell me.'

'I—I think I would rather,' said the poor fellow. 'I may as well out with it now as later, and I know you won't split on me.'

So, in a halting, sheepish fashion, he told his humiliating story, of which the reader is already in possession except the concluding stage. He had found Hussar more unmanageable than ever that afternoon, it seemed, and, on meeting Bob outside as usual, the temptation not to deliver his step-mother's message, and induce Bob to ride to Closeborough and execute the various commissions there in his stead, had proved irresistible—and now he was waiting here for Barchard to return.

From time to time his narrative was interrupted by Margot's irrepressible laughter—laughter in which there was a ringing undertone of a deeper contempt than she had ever felt for him before. He was divesting himself of the one quality and the single accomplishment that had been leading her to tolerate him of late. She could make no allowances for him—the very awkwardness and seriousness with which he made his confession rendered it the more fatally ludicrous in her eyes.

'Oh, Allen!' she said, as he ended, 'it really is too comic! To be afraid of poor dear Hussar—why, *Lettie* could ride him!'

'Likely enough,' he retorted sullenly, '*I* can't, anyway. Bob says he could do what he likes with me.'

'Bob is so very disinterested,' said Margot. 'You foolish fellow, can't you see that Bob did everything he could to frighten you into giving him up? And this has been going on every day. And, oh! the stories you have told! And your father thinking you were getting on so well! Why, you will be the laughing-stock of the whole place—and I'm sure you deserve it.'

'Are you going to tell then?'

'As if I should give myself the trouble!' said Margot contemptuously; 'but do you really expect to go on like this for ever? It is sure to come out some day, and if you are wise you will not leave your father to hear it from others. If you haven't nerve enough to ride, own it, and don't make yourself more ridiculous—if that is possible—than you are already. Go back and tell your father that you feel much safer on two legs than four, and that it was a mistaken kindness of him to give you a horse for a present.'

He writhed. 'You come down pretty hard on me,' he said.

'Oh, I don't pretend to pity you a bit, Allen; it is too contemptible from beginning to end.'

'Well,' he returned, '*you* won't be the worse for it, at all events. I shall get father to let you have Hussar.'

If he hoped to conciliate her thus he was disappointed. Margot's merciless laughter rang out afresh. 'How generous of you! Are you quite sure you can make such a sacrifice? I am afraid—unfortunately for me—your father will not be very likely to be guided by your wishes on that point after this.'

But through her mind the thought flashed eagerly. It was quite possible that she might be allowed to ride Hussar. Oh, the joy of being on a horse once more! Would there be any loss of dignity in accepting the mere use of him? Her eyes danced at the prospect, in spite of her words.

'Now, will you go back with Lettice and me—or what?' she said.

'I must stop about here till Bob comes back,' he replied uneasily.

'So you *will* play out your little comedy? And are you really venturesome enough to ride Hussar all the way back—nearly half a mile!—or will Bob hold you on? Pray don't run any risks.'

In spite of her merciless mockery he could not hate her; she looked so bewitching in the sombre half light under those gloomy pines, he would have given his life just then to win back her respect. She stood there a moment, and then, with a curt little nod, she turned away amongst the red pine stems.

He followed her with his eyes till the last glimpse of her dress had disappeared, and then, with a dull acquiescence in his own humiliation, he resumed his waiting.

The sky was no longer visible through the trees, the gloom grew more intense, the silence deeper, only broken by the sharp cracking and rustling of branches and the mysterious minute stir of invisible life. Why did not Bob return? He should have done so before this—it was pitch dark in the wood. He groped his way to the high road, which now showed only as a grey glimmer under a low starless heaven—there was nothing to be heard. Could Bob have passed already unnoticed?

He waited about in growing uneasiness, walking a few yards now in one direction, now in the other, hoping against hope that all was right. He could not present himself at home without knowing what had become of

Hussar; but at length it occurred to him as just possible that Bob might have brought him back to the stables himself, and he decided to go back and see if this were so.

Bob Barchard had passed an hour or two very agreeably at the bar of the Crown Hotel at Closeborough, thanks to the combined attractions of gin and water and a good-looking barmaid. It was somewhat late before he gave orders for 'his horse' to be brought round, and mounted under the admiring inspection of the barmaid, who came to the steps to see him depart, evidently taking him, as he felt with much satisfaction, for some young gentleman-farmer. He did not trouble himself about the various commissions which Allen had delegated to him —in fact he had forgotten them—so he started back on the Gorsecombe road at a brisk pace till he reached a part where the road was lined on either side with tall elms. Here the darkness, which, even in the open, was unusual at so advanced a season, was intense, and he walked his horse, guiding himself by the hedge he could just make out upon his right hand. He was a little drowsy and careless, and felt nothing but a muddled surprise that the road, which he had believed to be level, should decline as it did. He put it down to a symptom of his condition. Presently he thought he must have turned off the track in some way he could not account for, or how was it that the road seemed to be running alongside at a gradually rising level? He must get back—he roused Hussar and made him

scramble back somehow; but the road he was on was not the same as that he had left—softer, with shiny ruts that gleamed dully as if it were winter. Stop—*were* they ruts? What was Hussar stumbling at? He held him up, and brought him to a standstill, and as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness he began to recognise where he was. In some way he did not understand, he had got upon the line—those were the metals which he had taken for ruts. Well, he must get off again as soon as he could. He turned Hussar's head and urged him to return the way he had come; but the horse, confused by the strange feel of the ground, the darkness, and the faint vibrating hum which was borne down the line, pricked his ears and refused to stir. Bob grew impatient; he had no spurs, but he dug him in the ribs with his right heel, and then struck him smartly with the little stick he carried. Hussar became restive, and his rider began to see that he would require all his coolness if he was to induce him to obey; he coaxed him gradually to step across the rails, which he evidently regarded with distrust, and was on the point of succeeding when a long harsh scream in the distance upset the horse's already strained nerves. Bob himself was scarcely less startled, he knew what it must be—the express! There was not much time to lose, and in his hurry and alarm he pulled the curb sharply. Hussar plunged a little, the scream rose again, this time accompanied by a sullen roar, and the next moment the horse had swerved away from the quarter whence the noise proceeded, and was

galloping at full speed down the line. The ballast had been freshly laid, and formed a better track than might have been expected, but at any moment an uncovered sleeper might cause a stumble, and then—Bob shivered to think of it!

Faster and faster they went; he was as powerless as Allen might have been to stop the terrified animal now, and the roar and rumble behind were coming nearer and nearer. They were not on the same line of rails, but he knew he would not be able to control his course much longer; even if he could, the effect of an express passing at full speed upon a horse already frantic would bring their career to the inevitable end. Louder and louder grew the roar, and Hussar was flying more and more madly along the ballast. Bob was perfectly sober now, the shock had cleared his brain; he clung to the saddle instinctively, though he knew that his case was desperate, and the end must be soon. He was even impatient for it all to be over now, and, as they tore along, he suddenly thought of the pretty barmaid at Closeborough, and wondered what she would say when she heard. They were passing a signal-cabin now; the men in it shouted at him from the lighted windows, and he thought bitterly what fools they were if they supposed he was riding like this for pleasure. All this took scarcely an instant; the express was close behind him now, he could hear it bounding fiercely along the track, and now he saw two glaring lights and a trail of flame-touched steam ahead the up-train had just left Gorsecombe station.

He was directly in its track, and, if he kept his seat now, nothing could save him. There was only one chance and he took it; he shook his feet out of the stirrups, put his hands on the front of his saddle, shut his eyes, and, letting go the reins, threw himself off before the engine passed him.

When he recovered his senses, he was lying on his back in a bed of soft rushes below the railway bank; the roar and rattle were still in his head, but he staggered to his feet and found himself unhurt, though bruised and giddy and shaken. He clambered up to the line again; the metals were still warm, but the two trains had vanished, and of the horse he could find no trace.

It was characteristic of Bob that the first use he made of his recovered faculties was to swear at his ill-luck. When he had relieved his feelings to some extent in this fashion, he limped along to a level crossing which brought him into the high road again at a point within an easy distance from the village.

Margot, hastily summoned by Susan, found her mother in an almost distracted state.

'Tell me what you know,' she whispered; 'Allen has not come home. *What* is it that happened to him?'

Margot, who had heard nothing, was struck with wonder at this sudden solicitude on Allen's account. 'Happened to Allen?' she said. 'Why—nothing, mother!'

'You are keeping something from me; that horse

has killed him—I know it, Margot—and all through me. My God! what shall I do?'

'No, no,' said Margot, throwing her arms around her mother with a return of her old affection; 'you poor darling, it is a shame that you should be frightened like this. The horse cannot have hurt him, because he took care not to give it the opportunity. There, I half promised not to tell, but I can't see you in such a state and say nothing.' So she related her interview with Allen in the wood. 'He has not come home because he was ashamed to, and no wonder! *Now* are you satisfied? And how could it be through you, in any case?'

Mrs. Chadwick began to recover her self-control. 'Did I say so?' she asked; 'I was so horribly anxious, Margot, and—and it was I who asked him to ride over to Closeborough for me, that was all. Ah, here is your father. Joshua, tell me—was there nothing really the matter after all?'

He was still pale, and his face wore a heavy scowl. 'If you call a two-hundred-guinea horse cut to pieces on the railway nothing,' he said—'I don't myself.'

'Cut to pieces! oh, poor Hussar!' cried Margot, turning pale. 'And—and young Barchard—he was not—not killed?'

'So you knew of it, too!' he said. 'I suppose I was the only one in the dark. Killed! I wish he had been! A nice fellow he is to be trusted with a horse like that. And Allen—there's a son to be proud of! Why, I've been half mad with thinking he'd broken

his neck or worse. I might have spared myself! And you two were in this precious secret, were you, helping him to make a fool of me, eh?'

'You are quite wrong,' said Margot; 'I only knew this afternoon when we met him in the woods, and he told me he was afraid to ride the horse, and mother did not know till this very minute. I don't think you have any right to accuse us of such things.'

'I was wrong—there! Can't you see I'm not my own master? Where is that boy? I must have this out with him, and he'll hear some things he won't forget in a hurry. Have dinner without me, it's cold by this time. *I* can't touch anything!'

'How you are trembling, dear!' said Margot to her mother, when he had left the room; 'you are not frightened now, surely?'

'I—I have been a little upset by all this,' was the reply; 'that wretched boy!—let us be thankful it is no worse.'

'It is bad enough,' said Margot, 'to think of that beautiful horse being killed in this terrible way, and all because he was such a coward; it makes me hate him, mother!'

'I had been hoping to see *you* ride Hussar some day,' said Mrs. Chadwick.

'Don't talk about it,' entreated Margot; 'what does all that matter now? But, oh, I hope he will be made to feel ashamed of himself!'

'I think,' replied her mother rather grimly, 'that his father will take care of that.'

Allen had gone guiltily in by the stable-yard, but the stables were dark and closed, the coachman was probably at his meals indoors; he stole into the house and was met by Masterman.

'I was to say,' said that functionary, 'that master wished to see you the minute you come in, Mr. Allen, in the study.'

'Is—is anything up?' asked Allen; he did not dare to inquire whether Hussar had returned.

'I can't give you any information, sir, really,' was the answer, in a tone of lofty disapproval, for Topham had been bitter in his laments just before.

Allen went into the study.

'So here you are at last, sir,' was his father's greeting. 'And what have *you* got to say for yourself?'

'I—I know I haven't been acting quite—quite straight, guv'nor,' said Allen; 'but it's no use, I can't ride that horse any more.'

Chadwick gave a short, furious laugh. 'Well, no,' he said, 'you've taken care of that—do you know where he is now?'

'N—no,' said Allen.

'Well, the friend you were so good as to lend him to took him for a gallop along the line, and they found all that was left of the poor beast in the six-foot way an hour ago—that's good news for you, I dare say!'

Allen felt cold and sick. 'And Bob?' he said; 'what of Bob?'

'Oh, don't be alarmed; Bob's not born for that sort of end. He wasn't even scratched. I've just had

a talk with him, and heard how you've been taking your horse-exercise lately. A nice story it was, too!'

Allen was too much relieved to mind anything else just then; his father broke into a torrent of abuse, stimulated rather than disarmed by his silence; shame, wounded vanity, resentment at having been duped, anger at the loss of a valuable horse—all contributed to lend variety and force to Chadwick's expressions.

'There,' he said at last, 'I've tried to make a man of you, and this is all I've got for it. I'm damned if you're fit for anything but counter-jumping. It's enough to make a man wish he'd never had a son, all this shirking and skulking and lying. Tchah! get out of my sight; be off to bed, and stay there for all I care!'

Allen was glad enough to go; he was worn out and stunned to a sort of indifference, and yet, as he went up to his room, he had a forlorn feeling that henceforth his life would be changed, that the place he had so lately occupied in his father's affections was, through his own miserable folly and cowardice, lost to him for ever.

## CHAPTER V

### A SOJOURN IN COVENTRY

Le ridicule déshonore plus que le déshonneur.
*La Rochefoucauld.*

It was natural that such conduct as Allen's should cause some change in his father's feelings towards him, but Mrs. Chadwick herself could not have desired a more complete alteration than that which followed. He had always persuaded himself that the deficiencies of his son's early education would not hinder him from becoming a fairly creditable country gentleman, now that he was given opportunities. In this way he had salved his conscience for the neglect of many years, during which, with a little less self-indulgence, he might have done more for his son.

Forced as he was now to recognise that the results of that neglect could never be effaced, if he felt his own responsibility at all, the only effect it had was to put a keener edge upon his anger and infuse into his contempt a bitterer flavour.

For some time after Hussar's catastrophe, Chadwick led his son a wretched life, never losing an opportunity of indulging in some caustic allusion. 'Wilkins was asking me to-day' (Wilkins was the Gorsecombe station-

master) 'whether he should send up Hussar's saddle and bridle,' he said, on one occasion, when they were all at luncheon. 'They're not fit for anything now, but I suppose he thought' (he was addressing Allen) 'that you might like to keep 'em as a souvenir or something of that sort. Perhaps you would?'

Allen flinched and changed colour, as he declined these ghastly relics.

'Well, I daresay you're right,' was the retort, given with a short rasping laugh; 'you had precious little connection with 'em. I forgot that. Your friend Bob Barchard is the man they ought to go to; he's fairly earned 'em.'

His anger, which was nourished for some time by the curiosity and condolences of all Gorsecombe, abated at length, and lapsed into a contemptuous indifference with an occasional sarcastic outburst, but his confidence had gone for ever. Fate had seen fit to afflict him with a son who was an incorrigible cub, an abject cockney. He must put up with it, he supposed, but he could not forget how he had been deceived, or overcome his disgust at Allen's ingratitude and cowardice.

This change of attitude could not fail to have a certain effect upon the behaviour of the other members of his family, as it removed all necessity for keeping up an appearance of cordial relations with Allen. They did not attack him after his father's fashion, though Miss Henderson and Ida permitted themselves occasionally a languidly malicious innuendo, which generally missed its mark. Mrs. Chadwick, indeed, was a model of frigid

forbearance, while Margot spared his feelings from some latent instinct of generosity, and still more from a sense of his insignificance.

But, though he took a long time to find it out, there was no longer any attempt to disguise that his presence in the drawing-room of an evening was not a source of unmixed delight. He could not wander now, as he liked to do, from one to the other, making blundering attempts to join the conversation or game, or amusing himself by teasing Lettice and Ida, without being continually repulsed. It was: 'Allen, *do* you mind moving somewhere else? you are horribly in my light;' or, 'Allen, we do hate to have anybody looking on at us so;' or, 'Please let me alone, Allen, it teases;' and then his step-mother would remark, 'If you could only sit down quietly, and amuse yourself with a book or something, instead of being a perfect nuisance to everybody, it would be *such* a comfort!' and his father would bring up the rear by adjuring him, for God's sake, to do as he was asked, or leave the room.

Whereupon he would sit down and perhaps pretend to be engaged in a book, though he passed most of the time in furtively regarding Margot from behind it.

He fancied sometimes that, when his father indulged in his heavy gibes at his expense, she wore a look of discomfort, which he took for sympathy, and the belief made him able to endure many an unpleasant hour, for his was one of those natures which are capable of drawing a certain morbid pleasure from ill-treatment, if only they can feel that their wrongs excite compassion in the onlooker.

One onlooker at least did not conceal her sympathy, and that was the Miss Chevenings' maid, Susan, who found an opportunity one day to let him know that she considered him shamefully treated. Susan was not, perhaps, the person best entitled in the world to express abhorrence of domestic oppression, but it is not so very unusual for tyrants, large or small, to be moved with very sincere pity for their neighbour's victims.

Susan was of a contradictory turn of mind; she was tired of hearing her fellow-servants abusing the son of the house, particularly when they contrasted him unfavourably with his step-sisters. She exhorted him to stick up for himself, to show a spirit, and let certain people that thought themselves everybody understand that he wasn't to be treated like the dirt under their feet, with many other counsels as outspoken as she thought prudent.

Allen had no dignity to be offended; he was rather touched and grateful than otherwise, and had not experience to see that it was not altogether becoming or safe to encourage clandestine demonstrations of sympathy from a domestic who was far from ill-favoured.

Indeed, with Margot's face constantly before him, he did not so much as notice whether Susan was good-looking or not. He had not so many friends in that household that he could afford to reject this one, and so, without any intention on his side, a sort of alliance was established between them.

Perhaps Susan had motives of her own. He would be well-off some day, he would not be the first young

man who had been induced to make an unequal marriage; and then what a triumph it would be to find herself a sort of step sister-in-law to Miss Margot, especially if she were to hold the purse-strings!

But if she were ever to secure such a prize, she must, she knew, proceed with the greatest caution—the slightest indiscretion or appearance of haste would be fatal. So she was careful to avoid exciting remark in any way, encountering him now and then, apparently by accident, at times when they were unlikely to be disturbed, and adopting a tone of sympathy tempered by respect. She was not without hopes that the evident gratitude he showed would develop into something more, though for the present she was obliged to confess to herself that he gave no sign of anything like admiration.

However, it was fortunate for him in one way that he was less at home than formerly. It is true that the advantage was only relative, as he spent most of the time in the company of young Barchard.

No breach had occurred between Allen and Bob. That young gentleman had contrived to make it appear that he had narrowly escaped becoming the victim of his own self-sacrifice. He was magnanimous and forgiving; for, setting aside the distinction of being on friendly terms with one in Allen's position, the advantages in having a companion with the double recommendation of being always flush of money and readily induced to spend it were not to be lightly thrown away. He had proposed to teach Allen to drive as a respectable substitute for horse-exercise, and the offer was gratefully accepted.

There was a light trap which Bob had persuaded his father to buy, a vehicle which, though not showy, had nothing in its exterior to betray the shop, and the mare, if not much to look at, went well. Allen accompanied him in the business errands which formed the only work Bob consented to undertake and, under Bob's guidance, he did become a very tolerable whip.

This was better in some ways than loafing about the Agra House grounds, or wandering aimlessly along country roads to kill the time, and no one cared or asked questions about the manner in which he employed his mornings and afternoons.

There was nothing in Barchard's appearance to be ashamed of. He dressed well in a sporting style, for he cultivated the manners and amusements of a higher station if his tongue betrayed him occasionally. He 'knew his way about,' as he was accustomed to boast, and certainly had a considerable familiarity with such dissipation as Closeborough afforded. All this had its effect upon Allen, who was no great judge of character or breeding; he decidedly preferred Bob's society to his own, and it was generally his only alternative. But hitherto he had spent his evenings at home, and, while in Barchard's company, had withstood all temptation to take more drink than was good for him. His chief restraint was the fear of disgracing himself irretrievably in Margot's eyes.

For some time Allen had been troubled by a suspicion that Lettice was kept out of his way; an excuse was always ready—she had her lessons, or her music to

do, she was engaged to play a 'single' at tennis with Ida, she was going out to walk or drive with somebody else—the result being that he had never once been alone with her since that afternoon in the pine wood.

He was in the drawing-room after lunch one day with a lingering hope that Margot might condescend to play a game or two of lawn-tennis with him, bad player as he was. The Agra House drawing-room was divided into two by the wall in which the fireplace stood, and on either side of the fireplace was an arch connecting one room with the other, so that, practically, the two rooms were one. Allen was in the further room, and his step-mother was at her writing-table in the other. Presently he heard Lettice come in, evidently much excited. 'Mummy,' she said, 'may I go fishing? William has found a lot of worms under the manure by the stables. And may he come to put them on for me? They're such *leggy* worms, mother!' Mrs. Chadwick consented, and Lettice was off. Here was Allen's chance; he had bought Lettice the fishing-rod himself—she would not refuse to let him accompany her, he thought. So he slipped out, and intercepted her on her way to the stables. 'Going fishing, Lettie?' he said.

'Yes, Allen,' said Lettice shortly.

'You'll want some one to put the worms on,' he said; 'I'll come and do all that for you.'

'Thank you,' said Lettice, 'but I may take William.'

'They won't mind me going with you instead of William.'

Lettice looked down, and spoke in a muffled little voice. 'I would rather William went,' she said, 'I don't want you to come.'

'Some one's put you up to saying that,' he retorted; 'it isn't likely you'd say so of your own accord—such pals as we used to be, Lettie!'

'I'm not pals, which is a very vulgar word, Allen, any longer.'

'Oh, you aren't? Well, look here—just tell me this—what have I done?'

'You let poor dear Hussar be taken on the railway and killed, and Ida says she believes you wanted him to be, because you were afraid to ride him; and you told stories about it. I don't care to go fishing with people who do such things.'

'You don't seem to mind going fishing with the rod I gave you!' He intended this rather as an appeal than a sneer, but Lettice flushed at the reminder, and then, not without an evident struggle, said, 'Did you give it to me? I'd forgotten. Then you may have it back again; I don't want it.'

She held it towards him heroically. 'All right,' he said, as he took it. 'I didn't think you'd turn against me, but please yourself. I'll give you one more chance,' he added, with the hope of conquering her; 'if you won't take this thing back and let us two be friends again, I'll smash it—it's no use to me. Are you going to take it, or not?'

He might have known that this was the very last way to attempt to move Lettice.

'I have told you once,' she replied; 'I shan't tell you again.'

'Then, there!' he said, and broke it into several pieces, 'that's all you get by that!'

The moment he had done it he was ashamed of the impulse, especially as Lettice, her fortitude at an end, burst into tears. He caught her hands roughly. 'Don't cry, Lettie,' he said, 'I—I didn't mean it. I'll buy you another—a better one—only be friends again!'

She struggled to free herself. 'Let me go, you are hurting my wrists!' she said. 'I hate you—you're a bully; cowards always are!'

He dropped her hands as if they had burnt him. He laughed bitterly. 'Go it!' he said—it was his misfortune that he had no more dignified phrase at command—'don't mind me. You haven't a good word for me now, it seems. Make me out as bad as you can. If you hate me, I can do without you—I'm not so hard up for company as all that!'

Lettice had gone while he was speaking, and he turned away with a lump rising in his throat; he had loved this child; he loved her still; the discovery that she too had withdrawn her friendship had come upon him with a suddenness that had made him forget himself for the moment. And now he had offended her beyond all hope of forgiveness! How he wished now that he had not been so foolish as to threaten to reclaim his gift. Perhaps if he had not done that—well, it was too late to think of that now. He tried to persuade him-

self that it did not matter, and went down into the village to find Barchard.

'Has Lettie come back from her fishing yet?' Mrs. Chadwick asked Ida, as she came in to afternoon tea from the tennis-court; 'I don't like her to be down by the stream too long.' There was a little stream at the bottom of the grounds, covered with water-lilies, and inhabited by a few minute dace or roach, upon which Lettice had proposed to try her skill.

'She never went,' said Ida. 'Mother, what *do* you think Allen did? I was at the schoolroom window and saw everything. He actually met Lettie and took her rod away and broke it! Poor Lettie came in crying dreadfully, but she wouldn't tell me anything about it.'

'He is getting worse and worse!' said Mrs. Chadwick. 'He is a perfect plague to everyone in the house. And to be brutal to poor dear little Lettie, who has always been so sweet to him! I shall certainly ask his father to interfere. I will not have the child terrified like this!'

She spoke to some purpose, for when Allen entered the room in his usual shamefaced manner before dinner, Chadwick turned savagely upon him before them all.

'This drawing-room's no place for you, sir,' he said; 'you'll not be allowed to play the rough here. Just walk out of it, and don't let me hear of your ill-treating a child again!'

'He didn't ill-treat me!' declared Lettice. 'Ida, I didn't want you to tell.'

Yarrow had walked up to Allen, and was thrusting his long nose into his hand as he stood there.

'If I'm not to come into the drawing-room,' he said, 'where *am* I to go?'

'That's your affair,' said his father; 'there's plenty of other rooms in the house without coming here to be an annoyance to everybody.'

'Then I'm not wanted at dinner, either, I suppose?' he said, with a sinking heart.

'If you choose to behave decently while you are there, no one wants to prevent you from dining that I know of, but you'll keep out of this place till you have learnt to behave like a gentleman to your sisters.'

Allen went, Yarrow walking with him, much puzzled, as far as the door. He waited in the library till the gong sounded, and then hesitated. If he stayed away from dinner, he would gain nothing by it; he could not give up the pleasure, shot as it was with pain, of sitting opposite to Margot as usual. He pocketed his pride and went in.

Nothing was said to him throughout the meal, and, when Mrs. Chadwick and Margot had risen, his father addressed him for the first time. 'If you like to go into the billiard-room,' he remarked, 'it's lighted.'

'Are—are you coming?'

'I? No. I am going into the drawing-room presently. But, as I told you before dinner, the less they see of you in there the better they're pleased. If you will behave like a blackguard, you have yourself to thank for it. You needn't expect me to take your part,

after the way you've treated me; it serves me right for thinking I could ever make a gentleman of you!'

Perhaps Chadwick spoke as he did with some purpose of provoking his son to make some profession of sorrow and amendment, but Allen sat silent, afraid if he spoke of drawing down a fresh storm upon his head. Chadwick sat moodily smoking his cigar a little while, and then rose abruptly, leaving his son to follow his own devices.

Allen did not go up to the billiard-room; he put on a rough coat and took his pipe, and left the house for the inn in the village, where Bob had often said he spent his evenings. He would infinitely rather have sat in the drawing-room, coldly as he might be received there, but they would not have him, and at least he would be welcome at the White Lion.

It was Whitsuntide, and Nugent Orme had managed to get away from chambers for a few days and come down to the Vicarage. It was always a delight to return to the old home, but never before had he come back with this excited anticipation. For was it not as certain as anything could be that he would meet the girl whose face had never ceased to trouble him for nearly a year now? whose personality—good or evil, or, like most personalities, a subtle compound of both—fascinated him so powerfully? He heard much about her from his sister Millicent on the evening of his arrival, as they paced the Vicarage lawn together in the dusk after dinner. Very little diplomacy was required to bring Millicent to enlarge upon the subject. She was

full of Miss Chevening's praises; her wonderful beauty and the admiration she excited everywhere, her devotion to her sisters, and the sweetness with which she bore home trials.

Nugent was out soon after breakfast the next day —a lovely morning, with a light breeze and small silver clouds scudding across a sky of the deepest blue. He walked along the broad street, past the familiar little shops whose striped awnings were fluttering gaily. As he neared the infant school, he heard the monotonous rise and fall of rustic voices chanting, 'twice eleven are twenty-two, twice twelve are twenty-four,' with the solemn devotion of persons making a profession of faith. After the roar of London, it seemed very peaceful here, where the only person he met was the old postman in his summer white ducks. At the Seven Stars he turned in to have a talk with Mrs. Parkinjear, an old friend of his 'Ah, I knew the old lady would be the first you'd come to see, Mr. Nugent,' she told him, 'though the poor old lady can't see you, and a sad deprivation it is to lose one's sight. I step out o' nights sometimes and try if I can see the beautiful moon and the bright stars that in their courses roll, but it's all o' no use—I can't see nothin'; so here I sit in the sunshine and try to be content with the warmth, for we in the morning here, you see, gets it very beautiful, Mr. Nugent, don't us? And how hev you been getting along, sir? Ah, we've felt the want of you here, sir, in the place of your early birth. That Mr. Fanshawe, he don't keep up the cricket club as you used

to, and as to the arthritic sports, why, sir, they tell me in the tug-o'-war as Gorsecombe was pulled right over the line first go off by a team like Tadford! I sez when I heard of it, "Ah, they ought to hev had Mr. Nugent there—*he'd* never ha' bin pulled over the line if they tried till now." There's bin changes since last you were here, sir. No doubt you've heard as Mr. Chadwick's married a widow lady. It's a sad pity as his son shouldn't behave himself more suitable; it looks so bad for a young gentleman to be always about with such as that young Barchard; and to be seen in the bar of the White Lion every evening almost, with those whose company wouldn't do nobody any good. I'm glad they don't come to my house, and so I am sincerely. Ah, dear! it's time indeed a friendly word was spoken to him.'

Nugent was disappointed at such a report; he had hoped better things of Allen. However, he expected to find out more in the course of the afternoon, when he was, he knew, to meet the Agra House party at a tennis tournament at Holly Bank. But the chief person in his thoughts just then was certainly not Allen.

He had not been at home in time to put down his name as a player, so he was reduced to look on at the tournament. There was a large gathering, for most of the people in the neighbourhood had come over. The question of partners had been settled in the morning by drawing lots, and the results gave as much satisfaction as they ever do on these occasions, young ladies who had been drawn with indifferent players not always

troubling themselves to feign resignation. Mr. Fanshawe arrived late and breathless, in hybrid costume of black upper garments and white flannel trousers. 'So awfully sorry!' he exclaimed to Miss Eddlestone. 'Had a funeral over at Lingmere; you can fancy how ghastly it was for me, thinking all the time you'd be playing without me!' which caused Mr. Liversedge to utter the prediction that that young man would end his career as a bishop. And so the tournament proceeded, with the features characteristic of these social competitions: the talkative young lady who explained exactly why she had or had not taken or missed or left each ball; the humble young man who bungled everything and apologised profusely to a partner, who listened with chilling magnanimity and said it really did not matter; there was the casual player, the vicious player, the jocular player (represented on this occasion by Mr. Callembore, who was in great form, enacting an uproarious cockney). 'Another wegetarian!' he would yell, as a ball disappeared in a flower-bed. 'It's the young lady's turn to 'it the ball. Oh, it's astronomy this time!' as the ball soared into the sky. 'I hate letting these affairs get too stiff,' he remarked later, in self-justification, 'and I do flatter myself that if I am nothing else I am rather a good buffoon.'

Nugent had no opportunity as yet of speaking to Margot, who was playing on one of the courts. He had to be contented with watching her as she moved in her pretty cream-tinted tennis costume, and admiring the grace and decision with which she placed her balls.

She seemed to have got back her old light-heartedness and animation, and to be the girl he had met on the Trouville shore last summer. Whatever cares she had were sitting lightly on her just now.

Her adversaries were Joceline Hotham and young Stannion, the Admiral's son, whose red and white 'blazer' with the army button showed that he was not long from Sandhurst. The contest was close, as the sides were nearly equal, though Margot's partner, Fanshawe, was not always to be depended upon. She had set her heart on winning, being perhaps further incited by the calm manner in which Miss Hotham ignored her existence. For a long time the victory wavered, but at last a skilfully delivered serve of Margot's decided game and set in her favour. Then, to her surprise, Miss Hotham showed herself disposed to be gracious, and came to meet her conqueror. 'I've been wondering,' she said, 'whether you ever meant to know me again or not, because, unless I'm mistaken, we were at school together.'

'I thought you had forgotten,' said Margot.

'Ah, well,' said Joceline, 'I suppose neither of us liked to be the first. I'm coming over to see you some day, and have a talk over old times. How well you play tennis! I get so little practice at home now, with a brother at Oxford. That's the boring part of having a brother at a University, you know—one never sees him.'

'Doesn't one?' said Margot; 'I thought they had vacations and all that.'

'Oh, they do—but then they're always away on reading parties, or "stopping up" as they call it, or visiting, or something. I know I don't see Guy—oh, not once in six months, and then only for a few days! Here, little pink girl, just run and get me my gloves and sunshade, will you? My mother has them.'

'I don't know your mother, or your gloves, or your sunshade,' said Lettice, who was deeply offended at this allusion to her frock.

'Oh, I thought everyone about here knew mamma—never mind, I'll go myself,' and Miss Joceline fluttered across, leaving Margot to her reflections. She was not ill-pleased that Miss Hotham's *hauteur* had turned out to be more or less imaginary, but it was not that which occupied her mind just then. She was thinking still, when she turned and saw Nugent Orme standing before her.

## CHAPTER VI

### MARGOT ASKS ADVICE AND RECEIVES IT

> Till then her lovely eyes maintain
> Their pure, unwavering, deep disdain.
>
> *Matthew Arnold.*

MARGOT had known beforehand that Nugent Orme would be at Holly Bank that afternoon, and was aware of his presence almost as soon as he appeared on the lawn. For the pleasure it gave her she was less prepared; she was conscious of looking her best just then, glad that he should find her holding her own in Gorsecombe society; but that did not entirely account for the happiness she felt when they actually met.

She had forgotten—or had she never really noticed till then?—the mingled power and gentleness of his face, with its smiling grey eyes and square chin; even in the sound of his voice there was something pleasantly familiar. She was flattered and touched by the satisfaction it was not difficult to read in his expression. They were alone for the moment. Lettice had run off, and the general attention was concentrated on an exciting rally which was in progress on the more distant court. There was a garden

bench in a secluded angle of the shrubbery, and they could talk there without fear of being interrupted.

'And so,' said Margot, as she took her seat with a little sigh of luxurious relief, 'we have turned out to be near neighbours—it seemed unlikely enough at Trouville, didn't it? Do you know that your sister and I have sworn undying friendship already?'

'She was telling me so last night; I am very glad. I hoped you would be friends. And you don't regret Chiswick too bitterly?'

'It is no use regretting—though I do sometimes; you know home never can be quite the same thing now.'

'I know,' he said simply.

'Of course one gets used to most things. I don't want you to think I am complaining, but you can understand it is—well, a little trying sometimes. I make the best of it. I do indeed.'

'I am sure you do. I have not seen my old pupil, Allen, here this afternoon.'

Her lip took its old disdainful curve. 'Allen?' she said, raising her eyebrows, 'oh, no, he would be rather out of his element here; he prefers very different company. He has no taste for civilised society, though that is fortunate, perhaps.'

'I am sorry,' he said slowly; 'I had hoped that he would improve under—under better influences.'

'You were always rather an optimist about him. If there are better influences I'm afraid he doesn't appreciate them.'

She was silent for a while, and sat spreading and shutting her hand in the restless manner he remembered; then she turned to him suddenly. 'I've been thinking,' she said slowly, 'wouldn't it be a good thing for him if he went to college? He is not too old?'

'Too old? no, I have seen grey-headed undergraduates with a wife and family, for that matter—but I am not at all sure that Allen would be the better for going to a University.'

'Why?' she said a little shortly, 'I thought you would be sure to agree!'

'Well, you see, he's not naturally clever; he's had next to no education; he isn't athletic—he might get into a bad set there.'

'It couldn't possibly be worse than the set he has in the village,' she replied; 'I should have thought even the worse kind of undergraduates would be better for him than village boors who are not gentlemen in any sense of the word. And why should he not make some friends who would do him good—isn't college a place for that?'

'There is one objection at the outset,' he said; 'most colleges, if not all, have an entrance examination—matriculation it is called—before you can join them; it is not difficult, to be sure, in most cases, but, simple as it is, I doubt whether he could pass it now.'

'If it is simple,' she said, 'he could be coached for it—no one is too dull to be coached; you are making difficulties, Mr. Orme! Oh, how I wish I could make you see that it is the best thing for him—he really

can't be allowed to go on like this, it is too dreadful to see it!'

She spoke eagerly, almost passionately, from the desire she felt to escape from the constant burden of her step-brother's presence, which had begun to react upon her nerves. It was not that he was actively aggressive or offensive—he was not even in the house for the greater part of the day; but stories, often exaggerated, reached her of the habits he had fallen into —of his driving, drinking, and betting with low associates—which increased her original repulsion. When he was at home she was troubled by the sight of him sitting, mute for the most part, and unnoticed, except when his father made him the butt of some savage satire. She resented the stolid misery and abasement —in his face, and it oppressed her to feel that his eyes were constantly following her movements. She felt him, in short, as an embodied reproach, protesting dumbly against an aversion which she could not and did not wish to overcome.

Margot was a little provoked at Orme's opposition; she had counted upon his assistance to her scheme, which, suggested within the last few minutes by Joceline Hotham's remark, had already matured until she was firmly convinced of its advantages.

Orme naturally saw nothing but the eagerness, which, as he put it down to the best and purest motives, only increased his admiration for her; but he knew Allen too well to believe that he would gain anything but harm from a University career, and not even

Margot's pretty impetuousness could lead him to take her view.

'So you won't speak to my step-father?' she said at last, after exhausting her arguments; 'I know he has a great respect for your opinion.'

'If I spoke I should advise him against it,' he said; 'it would only end in fresh disappointment. It is so good and kind of you to be so anxious that he should have a chance of doing better, but I can't honestly approve of your plan, and it's better to tell you so at once.'

Margot was absently tracing the network of her racket with one supple forefinger; her eyes had a touch of compunction in them as she raised them at last. 'You think me better than I am,' she said a little defiantly, in spite of her eyes. 'I don't pretend to be a quite unselfish person, Mr. Orme. I still believe Allen would be better at college, but it is not entirely on his own account that I want him to go. It would be such a relief if he were to be away sometimes! He is only uncomfortable at home, and he makes us all uncomfortable too. Well, I must bear it, I suppose, as you are evidently against me. Please don't mention my poor plan to anybody. I want you to promise me that?'

'Certainly,' he said, 'there is no necessity to say anything about it now that it is given up.'

'Of course not,' she said hastily, and just then their *tête-à-tête* was broken in upon by Mrs. Eddlestone with the news that Margot was wanted to play off the

final set at once, and that Mr. Fanshawe was looking for her everywhere.

'Isn't she a dear?' exclaimed Mrs. Eddlestone, as if she quite expected Orme to assent. 'Dottie and Pussie and Fay perfectly rave about her. Such a sweet disposition! Now do come and be introduced to her mother, she's quite somebody to know.' Orme was led up to Mrs. Chadwick, who was on the lawn, and disposed to be more gracious than on their first acquaintance, for she had observed that the vicar's son was not a person to be snubbed. 'We are having a few friends to dinner to-morrow,' she said in the course of the conversation, 'could you forgive such a very short notice and come too? We shall be so delighted to see some one who recalls dear Trouville—do say yes, if you possibly can!'

Orme said 'yes' with some alacrity, and the remainder of the afternoon passed without his being able to gain more than a word or two at parting from Miss Chevening. He walked home in a sort of glamour, possessed by the thought of her. In spite of her disclaimer, he believed that there was little of real selfishness in her nature. She was sorry at heart, he felt certain, for that unhappy Allen—anxious for his improvement; and how submissively she had renounced her plan when he had shown her the objections to it! Perhaps, after all, he had been wrong in opposing it; perhaps—but here his speculations were cut short by meeting the subject of them. Allen was certainly altered for the worse; there was a sullen bravado in his manner; he avoided meeting Nugent's eyes, and seemed in a hurry

to escape. Orme was involuntarily repelled for the moment, but pity prevailed; if the poor fellow was taking to bad courses he might still be saved; there was a look of unhappiness about him that touched Nugent.

'No,' said Allen, in answer to his question, 'you didn't see me at Holly Bank, not likely. I keep clear of that kind of start, I do. And another thing, I wasn't asked.'

'Well, look here—come home with me now and have some dinner. I can send up to Agra House and let them know where you are. My people will be delighted.'

'A lot they'll care at home where I am!' said Allen; 'but I won't come, all the same, Orme. I—I promised some chaps I'd look in some time.'

'That's nonsense!' said Orme. 'Come, you won't refuse to give me an evening; I shan't let you off.'

Allen submitted at last to be carried off to the Vicarage, where Millicent at least understood her brother's motives, and did her best to make the visitor feel that he was welcome and at home. The dinner passed off rather stiffly at first. Allen was shy and suspicious, and the vicar was lazily and rather condescendingly kind; his wife put on her stateliest airs, and the chief burden of the conversation was borne by the brother and sister, as Allen could not be induced to utter more than monosyllables. But gradually he got over his *mauvaise honte*, and after dinner, when Millicent was taking him round the garden, he showed signs of

recognising her efforts to win his confidence. He made her feel uncomfortable indeed at last by his almost abject gratitude. She sought in her embarrassment to interest him in the village concert that was to come off shortly, and even appealed to him for the name of anyone he might know who would be likely to help—an innocent piece of flattery which gave him an unfamiliar sense of importance. It was the happiest evening he had passed for some time, and he was pressed at leaving to come again, with a sincerity that sent him away with a feeling that there was at least one place besides the 'White Lion' or the Barchards' abode where he could count upon a friendly reception. Nugent walked up to the house with him, and took the opportunity to ask him if there was any truth in the rumours he had heard. Allen admitted that he had been in the habit of passing his evenings lately in one of the village inns, and even that he had dropped money at betting. 'Only in a small way, Orme,' he said, 'and the guv'nor pays my allowance regular enough, so I keep right. And the company are quite respectable—they always treat me like a gentleman. You may say what you like, but I must have some sort of society!'

'I'm not going to preach, my dear fellow,' said Orme, 'but you heard what the mother and Millicent said just now. You've always the Vicarage to come to. Remember that. I shall see you to-morrow at dinner, if not before—Mrs. Chadwick asked me this afternoon.'

'I suppose I shall be dining too,' said Allen; 'and, Orme, if you get a chance, say a good word for me to—

to her. Tell her I'm not such a downright bad chap as she thinks.'

'I don't believe she does think anything of the sort,' said Orme. 'I do know she's distressed by knowing that you are in such indifferent company—let her see you mean to drop it.'

'She don't care much,' said Allen; 'at least, I wish I was surer she did; but I'll keep steadier, Orme.' And so they parted—Orme to walk back, feeling more hopeful of Allen's future.

Allen found the house locked up for the night, and the door was unfastened by his father, who was fuming: 'I'm not going to have my servants kept up late to let you in from whatever pot-house you've given the honour of your company to. Another time I'm hanged if I'll sit up myself—mind that!'

'I didn't know it was late,' said Allen. 'I've only been——'

'Don't tell *me* where you've been! I want no more lying. I've got my eyes pretty well open by this time. Hold your tongue now, and be off to your bedroom.'

Allen obeyed; his father would not believe him if he spoke, and, after all, it did not matter—he was growing accustomed now to being stormed at.

When Nugent entered the drawing-room at Agra House the next evening he found the other guests assembled, mostly people he knew, and the few minutes before dinner were taken up in exchanging greetings and recognitions. He had just a careless word and a smile from Margot, and was sent in with one of the

latest arrivals, whom he had not met before, an immature young lady whose conversation was restricted to replying 'Yes,' 'No,' and 'Fancy!' alternately, with the air of a startled rabbit, which reduced him at last to studying the company.

There was old Rear-Admiral Stannion, bluff, outspoken, and kindly, with his wife; Mr. and Mrs. Callembore; young Maltby, the brewer's son; the leading doctor and his wife, and others—not a very formidable gathering in any way, though Chadwick did not seem at ease in his place at the head of the table, it seemed to Nugent.

Such efforts as he made to entertain his guests on either hand chiefly took the form of cross-questioning them on local subjects. 'Now, how far do you call it from where you live to Gorsecombe? What distance do you make it from your place to Closeborough? Who's got that big place before you come to the cross roads on Frogley Heath? How long have they had it?' Orme heard him inquiring, without apparently paying much attention to the answers he received.

Margot was seated some distance down on the opposite side; she wore a dress of some delicate shimmering material of palest green, against which the full white throat and slender neck seemed fairer still as she inclined her head with her usual air of stately submission to the conversation of her neighbour, a stout little man who was holding forth on the number of unlet farms in the district, and the difficulty of satisfying tenants.

Allen, Nugent observed, was absent after all, though no one else took any notice of that circumstance.

Only the sight of Margot kept that dinner from being a weariness to Nugent, who had to divide himself between the duties of following Mrs. Callembore's limp commonplaces and endeavouring in vain to get the startled-rabbit young lady to depart from her little formula.

When the men were left alone, Chadwick moved to the other end, next to the Admiral, who at once began to tackle him on the question of some barbed wire he had put up along his boundaries, whereupon Chadwick showed symptoms of losing his temper.

'They're all at me about it,' he was saying; 'hang it all, Admiral, what business is it of anybody's? Cruel to children and dogs! Let 'em keep out of my land, then—it's not much to ask. I've had that wire put up, and it shall stay up!'

'Well,' said the Admiral, 'all I can tell you is that if you insist on keeping such an abominable invention —an infernal thing that'll kill all sport if it's allowed to spread—you'll make yourself devilish unpopular with the county, that's all.'

'Do you think I don't know,' said Chadwick, who had had quite enough wine, 'that if it wasn't for my wife it would be long enough before I saw the inside of any house but my own? Popularity's her business. I mean to manage my own property my own way, and if anybody don't like it they must do the other thing—no offence to you, Admiral!'

The Admiral was only restrained by his disgust from very plain speaking indeed, and the proposition to adjourn to the drawing-room came as a relief to all.

It was some time before Nugent could find any opportunity of approaching Margot. She was the centre of a small group in the further drawing-room, and he had to exercise patience for some time; but the people who had some distance to go began to take their leave first, and in the general move that followed he found himself near her.

'Are you going too?' she said; '*you* have not a long drive before you.'

'I am not going until I have had a few minutes' talk with you—if you will let me.'

'Why, of course, there has been no opportunity till now, has there? Sit down there, it is quite early!' He took the seat she indicated, and she sat down on a couch under a lamp, looking at him with unsuspicious and innocent eyes, which made it difficult for him to begin.

'I wanted to speak to you,' he said at last, 'about —about Allen.'

She made a little piteous grimace. '*Must* we really speak about Allen?' she said; 'if you only knew how I want to be amused just now!'

'I hope what I am going to say will not amuse you. Since we met yesterday, I have seen him, and learnt a good deal about his position in this house. I thought I should have seen him here to-night.'

'I'm sorry you were disappointed. There was no

room for him at the table, I suppose, but I can assure you that the conversation did not suffer very much from his absence.'

'Yesterday afternoon you seemed anxious to keep him from bad company—you speak indifferently enough now.'

'You would have nothing to say to my plan, and it is hopeless to keep him out of mischief while he is living here. Why should I trouble myself with what he does and where he goes? I wish he could manage to tear himself away from his favourite haunts a little earlier, that is all, and then there would not be a scene when he comes in, as there was last night.'

'You think he was at his favourite haunts last night?'

'He was at some horrid place, or he would not have been so late.'

'I hope you don't consider the Vicarage comes under that description, because that is where he really was—I walked up with him to the gates.'

'Oh!' said Margot; 'then I suppose I ought to apologise. How noble of you to have him!'

'From what he said, I'm afraid he is not much encouraged to spend his evenings at home.'

'Well, no, but it is quite his own fault. His father would not have forbidden him to come into the drawing-room if he had not behaved roughly to my little sister Lettice, though he was thoroughly disgusted with him long before that. And, as for Allen, I really think he is happier left to his own devices. He does not care

to be with us—in fact, I almost believe he dislikes us all for being here, as if we could help it!'

'You are mistaken,' said Orme earnestly, 'you are indeed—you would not say so if you had any idea how deeply he feels being practically excluded and kept at a distance.'

'I so much prefer him at a distance.'

'And, provided that he is kept out of your way, you are careless what pain it may cause him, what temptations he may be exposed to? Miss Chevening, you do not really mean that?'

'I don't want him to be pained or tempted,' she said uneasily, 'but how can I help it?'

'Surely you could interfere if you would? You could use your influence to have him re-admitted to this room, you could show him a little encouragement, a little sympathy, now and then. If he is cut off from any real association with home life, can you wonder if he is driven to find amusement where he can, or if he loses all self-respect and grows reckless? Things are not very bad as yet: a very little sacrifice of your private prejudices will save him—and you will not even make an effort!'

She was listening with lowered eyes, her chin resting in her palm, a certain lingering rebelliousness (for, as we know, Miss Chevening was not inclined to be very submissive while her faults were being pointed out) in the corners of her mouth; she made no answer.

'I have offended you?' he said. 'I daresay you think I have no business to say all this. Perhaps I

am only boring you. I can't help it—one must be a bore sometimes when one is in earnest about a thing. I'm in earnest now. I want this poor fellow to have a fair chance of keeping straight in future. Think whatever you choose about me, only try to make things easier for him—you will never regret it!'

She shot a swift glance under her lashes at him as he sat there, forgetful of everything just then but the cause he was pleading; she was not angry, only troubled now by a dim sense of the mastery which, evidently without suspecting it, he was beginning to exert over her will. She disliked Allen as deeply as ever, she did not wish him to frequent the drawing-room as before; she felt little real sympathy for him—but she was anxious to make even this sacrifice rather than lose Nugent's good opinion.

'I don't think you are a bore at all,' she said; 'I think you make a good advocate. And—and I *will* try to treat him differently. I will speak to Mother about it: does that make you any happier?'

'Much,' he said, his face brightening. 'You will be better than your word, I am sure.'

'Don't be too sure!' she said gravely, 'my good fits never last very long. But I *am* sorry if I have been unjust to him. I will try to be kinder, only I don't think you at all know what an effort it will be!'

'So long as you make it!' he said as he rose. 'And—you do forgive me for speaking like this?' he added. 'I felt I must.'

'Not for the first time!' she said, smiling; 'but I

forgive you. I don't like being scolded, but I suppose I deserve it—you see what a state of meekness you have reduced me to!'

'I knew she was not really hard-hearted,' he was thinking as he went away that evening. 'She feels more than she cares to show. I made no mistake in appealing to her. How lovely she looked under that lamp! It's just as well I have only a few days to be here, or else—pshaw! What is the use of being a humbug about it—I *am* in love with her, have been ever since I met her first, but I might as well cry for the moon. Long before I have made money enough to think of telling her, she will have married some fellow in the county. Not that she would be likely to care for me in any case. Well, I've done Allen a good turn at any rate!'

## CHAPTER VII

### CARELESS CLEMENCY

She is too kind to be cruel, and too haughty not to pardon
Such a man as I—'twere something to be level to her hate.
*Lady Geraldine's Courtship.*

AFTER having invited Nugent Orme to dinner, Mrs. Chadwick had made the discovery that it would 'quite put out her table' if Allen were to be one of the party, and to conciliate this fastidious piece of furniture he was given to understand that he was expected to absent himself.

So, while the dinner party was in progress, he had his dinner brought in to him in the study by Susan, more ostentatiously sympathetic than ever, and ate it alone, to the sound of distant laughter and talk from the dining-room. But, to tell the truth, he was far from thinking this a hardship—he hated dinner parties, never knowing either what to talk about or how to eat at them, and now there was the fresh terror that his father might attack him publicly and expose him to general derision.

'I made Masterman give me some champagne for you, Mr. Allen,' said Susan; 'all he could spare, and he didn't let me have *that* without a grumble. I do call it

a shame and a scandal, if I was to lose my place the next minute—you to be sent out to dine alone, as if you wasn't good enough for the rest of them!'

'I don't care, Susan. I'd rather eat here than with all those people, for that matter. I don't have to think every minute how I'm behaving.'

'Ah,' said Susan, 'you're one of the soft-shelled kind—you let yourself be put upon, so it's no wonder you're took advantage of. But before I'd see myself stood aside to please that high and mighty Miss Margot——'

'She had nothing to do with it, so you're mistaken there, Susan!'

'P'raps I don't know what I'm talking about, but it so happens that I do. She's as artful as a cockatress, for all her big, innocent eyes, and her face as she thinks so pretty. You'd ha' bin back in the droring-room long ago if it hadn't been for her—it's her as don't think you fit to enter her gracious comp'ny, so make no mistake!'

After Susan had gone, Allen sat pondering—was it true? He couldn't believe it, and yet, if it should be! He had clung so long to the hope that, in a way, she was not ill-disposed towards him, that in time they would become friends—what if he had to contend with a concealed, deep-rooted dislike that nothing he could do would ever soften? For the moment he felt inclined to give up all his good resolutions, to go out and seek the only solace open to him, but the thought of Millicent and the Vicarage prevailed. He would stay quietly at home that evening, and give no handle for fresh complaint. So he lit his pipe and, finding a volume of an

illustrated weekly paper, he turned over the pages until he gradually dropped off to sleep.

He opened his eyes to find Margot standing before him in the radius of the lamplight, and stared stupidly at first, under the impression he was dreaming still, such a resplendent and visionary being did she seem just then in her dainty evening frock.

She had to conquer a rising disgust; his appearance just then, in his old tweed coat and dishevelled drowsiness, was not inviting; the dinner had not been removed, and the room was heavy with the fumes of food and stale tobacco, which offended her senses—she drew her own conclusions from the empty champagne bottle on the tray. 'This is the interesting penitent Mr. Orme is so anxious I should help!' she thought to herself, with a bitter little smile. All this gave a little severity to her tone when she spoke. 'Allen, do you know that it is quite late? All the people have gone.'

'Have they?' he said; he was awake now, and Susan's words had returned to him. 'Well, Margot, I've kept out of their way, and yours—you ought to be satisfied!'

She saw that his brain was clear enough, and spoke more gently. 'Have I ever said that I wished you to keep out of my way? It was about that very thing that I came to find you. I have been speaking to your father just now, and he says he never meant to banish you from the drawing-room altogether, and—and Mother hopes you will come in every evening as you used to do.'

'Margot,' he said huskily, 'you've done all this for

me—and when I'd been fancying—oh, I'll never forget this; ask me to do anything for you—I don't care what, and I'll do it, I will! I'm not an ungrateful chap!'

He tried to seize the pendent hand which was near him, but she drew back instinctively. 'Ask you to do something?' she said lightly; 'well, then, I ask you not to sit up any longer just now.'

He went to his room with a heart swelling with adoring gratitude. Never again would he believe Susan's insinuations; so far from hating him and wishing to keep him away, Margot had actually condescended to intercede for him, to get him permission to be more often in her society! How could he ever do enough for her?

On the following Sunday Orme met Margot in the churchyard after service and walked home by her side. 'Allen has told me how good you have been,' he said; 'it was like you!'

The evident approval and admiration in his face gave her a thrill of pleasure; she liked him to believe in her in this way, it almost reconciled her to Allen.

'You seem to forget,' she said, 'that it was your own suggestion.'

'You were the only person able to carry it out, and now, thanks to you, he is put on his feet again. I don't think you will ever regret what you did.'

'Oh, but I do,' she said with her light laugh; 'don't look disgusted—I only meant that effusive gratitude is rather a bore. I never was meant to be a patron saint, and it makes me feel so very absurd.'

'You take a delight in pretending to have no sympathy,' he said, 'I know you better now.'

'Do you?' she replied a little sadly; 'ah, I wish I knew myself!'

Nugent, in the course of a second visit to Agra House, was able to see that Allen's position in the family was very much improved already. Margot's example had had its influence even on Chadwick. There was a spice of mockery perhaps in her complaisant acceptance of Allen's crude attempts to join in the conversation, but it was not ill-natured, and on several occasions he noticed that she interposed on his behalf—it touched him to see the evident gratitude Allen felt for her protection, and the increase it made in his self-respect. He was more convinced than ever of the sweetness and goodness that underlay Miss Chevening's surface pride and waywardness.

And Margot was trying hard to conquer her deep-seated prejudices, though, perhaps without her knowledge, she was impelled by Orme's presence to conform for the time to the ideal she knew he had of her, as we sometimes unconsciously do when in the company of those who, as we may be aware, take us to be better or worse than we really are.

So Allen had no excuse and no desire now for spending his evenings in Barchard's society; he was often at the Vicarage, where he had a firm friend in Millicent, who employed him, to his delight, in helping in the preparations for the village concert now close at hand. He came over on the morning of the day to inform her complacently that he had engaged a friend of his at

Closeborough to come over and sing—a rattling clever chap—and Allen himself would accompany him on the banjo. Millicent did not like to decline this offer, for fear of hurting his feelings, as he was evidently much in earnest about it. 'I've told the schoolmaster' (who was in charge of the entertainment), 'and he says it'll be all right; and I say, Miss Orme, don't tell Margot, she don't know I can play the banjo, and I want to surprise her, you see.'

Privately, Millicent doubted whether this accomplishment would excite any rapturous amount of astonishment in Miss Chevening, but she was glad to see this young man interested in anything, and was too kindly in nature to discourage him. The Ormes were popular in the neighbourhood, which caused a number of people to drive in for the concert who would much rather have stayed away. There were others who grumbled at having to dine early, and others still who, professing to think the whole affair a horrid bore, looked forward to it secretly as a social event. At this time of the year life in the country, especially for those who are pining for the London season, is not so full of incident as to prevent even a village concert from being a dissipation in its way, and the pretty Gorsecombe school-rooms were crowded that evening with an audience, afterwards described by the 'Pineshire Telegraph,' with an emphasis intended to be complimentary, as 'one to which, in point both of brilliancy and fashion, we can recall none inferior.'

In the front seats were 'the gentry': Sir Everard

and Lady Adela—he in a grumpy condition from his early dinner and drive, she with a set determination on her face to be pleased with everything beforehand; Miss Hotham, exchanging little handshakes over backs of chairs and across benches, and peering about through a pair of eye-glasses she put up from time to time; the old Admiral and his party; Liversedge, rendered more caustic than usual by dyspeptic conditions; the Eddlestones, the Chadwicks, and, in short, *le tout Gorsecombe*, as a young man who had spent his last Easter in Paris remarked at the time. Behind came the farmers, the local miller, the chemist, and representatives of village trade generally; then the cottagers and the labourers; and at the extreme back, on raised seats, pot-hatted, red-faced, brilliant in green and orange neckties, and emphatic in the matter of boots, the hobble-de-hoydom of that village and one or two adjoining it had assembled. In spite of the mottoes and decorations, the interior had the severity, partly scholastic, partly ecclesiastical, characteristic of such places, with the drab walls, the educational diagrams, the black, glistening squares of the windows. The atmosphere was somewhat strongly agricultural, though dominated by the paraffin lamps.

The programme was as varied as usual. The choir children huddled together on the platform with wondering round eyes, and sang nursery quadrilles under Millicent's direction. Then the village butcher roared a bass song in praise of cricket, with no discoverable tune in it, after which Miss Pussie Eddlestone recited

'Maud Muller' as young ladies generally do recite this favourite piece — that is, with a lingering tenderness on all the least important words. The amount of pathos she threw into the 'small tin cup' was remarkable as an instance of misdirected energy, and she did considerably more than justice to the 'innocent surprise' of Miss Muller's eyes. As a second piece, she gave a piece of anonymous American sentiment called 'Pappa's Letter,' and the more impressionable part of Gorsecombe wept profusely over the little boy whose mother pasted a stamp in sport amid the waves of golden light on her little boy's forehead, and who was run over by a waggon and killed in consequence. 'She has so much feeling!' Mrs. Eddlestone whispered, beaming with complacency; 'dear Pussie, she will be dreadfully knocked up to-morrow!' As a corrective there came a comic conjuring entertainment by Mr. Callembore, and after that Mr. Fanshawe sang a Bedouin Love Song, the effect of which was a little marred by his accompanist handing him between the verses one of the candles from the piano to be re-lighted. The poor curate, too flurried to understand this, stood clasping the candlestick throughout the next verse, thereby destroying much of the effect of its passionate refrain—

Till the stars grow o-old!
And the moon is co-old!

However, Gorsecombe saw nothing ridiculous about it, so it was of no consequence. Then Margot's turn came; she had chosen the pretty old ballad of 'Barbara

Allen.' Her clear sweet voice made every line tell. She might have been Barbara herself, careless, perverse, incredulous, as she came to the scene by the death-bed, with such brilliant heartlessness did the cruel little speeches fall from her lips. One at least of her hearers felt a strange pain as he listened, as if it were real, and he compelled to witness her cruelty. For the moment, as she stood there in her proud young beauty, her face partly in shadow, and the light from the rather smoky little metal lamps behind falling softly on the outline of her dusky crown, Nugent Orme was wondering if this strangely bewitching girl belied her real nature as much as he had tried to believe. But she sang the last verses with a tenderness that reassured him, that for the rest of the audience turned the current of sympathy back again to remorseful Barbara dying of her tardily awakened passion. There was a little hush as her voice died away at the end, and then came a storm of applause. She had to sing again before she could return to her seat at her mother's side, and soon a little folded paper was passed to her. It was from Joceline Hotham. 'Don't run away before the end,' she read, 'Mamma is so anxious to know you. How delightfully you sing!'

Mrs. Chadwick read the note too, and with an elation she found it hard to repress. The Hothams were the people she had most desired to know, the only people who had taken no notice of her. Lady Adela was evidently attracted by Margot; this introduction could hardly fail to lead to an acquaintance sooner

or later. With Hawleigh Court open to her, Mrs. Chadwick felt that she could more easily bear all that she found disagreeable in her home life. She handed the note back to her daughter. 'I've no doubt we shall meet them as we come out,' she said with a voice that tried to be unconcerned.

The entertainment proceeded with a reading by a literary young carpenter, who selected the chapter on the condemned cell from 'Sketches by Boz,' a work which he had recently discovered at the Book Club. He read with much power, dwelling with harrowing force upon the 'h' in each hour that remained to the unhappy convict. Then the schoolmaster, who conducted the proceedings, announced 'A comic song by Mr. Bilkins, accompanied by Mr. Allen Chadwick—*not* on the programme.'

Mrs. Chadwick glanced interrogatively at Margot, who returned the look by one of amused disclaimer. But amusement turned to dismay when Allen and his friend appeared on the platform arrayed in the costume of what used to be known as 'Ethiopian serenaders.' Poor Allen sneaked in, looking miserable under his lamp-black, and began to try the strings of his banjo with hot, limp fingers, evidently unaware that it was out of tune. Mr. Bilkins was a rather rowdy young solicitor's clerk from Closeborough, whose acquaintance Allen had made at the bar of the 'Crown' in that city; he swaggered on with perfect ease, and began a dialogue in the dialect of the stage nigger with Allen, who supported him very indif-

ferently. The dialogue and the little mannerisms in which Bilkins indulged were by no means in the best taste, and a kind of shiver began to run through the front benches before many sentences were exchanged. The fact was that Bilkins had been stimulated by Bob Barchard (who was actuated partly by love of mischief and partly by finding Allen less disposed for his society) 'not to mind the swells and make it as lively as he could.' Allen's own part was confined to thrumming a simple accompaniment and walking round his chair between the verses, and, though his own taste was none of the most refined, he was struck himself by the unsuitability of some of the verses to that audience—they had never sounded quite so vulgar before. He felt more and more uncomfortable in spite of the frantic applause from the back benches, but he could not back out of it now. It was fortunate for him that he could see no one in the audience at all distinctly, or the kind of scandalised bristle observable in some quarters would not have rendered him more at his ease. Chadwick alone in the front seats was amused by the performance; he was delighted, even with Allen. 'He's really not bad,' he chuckled to his wife, 'not bad at all. I never thought the fellow had it in him.' Mrs. Chadwick made no reply—she was too angry. That her husband should actually be blind to the enormity of this last outrage was only a fresh proof, if that were needed, of the disparity between them. Margot accepted the exhibition with resigned contempt, she tried to feel that she was not involved in it personally; what was it to her if this wretched boy

chose to make a fool of himself publicly? The poor vicar was, after all, the greatest sufferer; a lazy, shy, and kind-hearted man, he did not like to stop the performance unless it became absolutely necessary, and so he sat fidgeting nervously until it was over, and a repetition was being demanded vociferously from the rear. Then he could stand no more and rose, holding up his hand for silence. 'I think,' he said, 'as our programme is already long, it had better not be interrupted by—by anything that this is hardly a fitting place for. I don't wish to say more, if I am understood.'

'Set o' muffs!' said Bilkins in the retiring-room; 'why, I had the patter straight from the original nigger who came down to the "Accordion" starring, and as for the song, you could sing it to a Sunday school almost. Well, we made 'em sit up, old fellow!'

'I wish I'd known you were going to sing that one,' said Allen gloomily, 'I could have told you they wouldn't see the jokes in it.'

'It will not be very pleasant,' Margot was saying at the same time to her mother, 'to have to go up and speak to Lady Adela—after this!'

Mrs. Chadwick glanced towards the seats occupied by the Hotham party—they were empty. 'You are spared the ordeal, my dear,' she said, and her face showed how difficult she found it to control her rage and disappointment. 'As I expected, the refined humour of that last performance has been too much for them.'

As Nugent said good-bye to Margot, for he was

going up to chambers the next morning, she remarked, 'I suppose even you were surprised at my gifted step-brother's triumph this evening—are you not going to congratulate us?'

'I can't think what possessed him,' he replied with a disgust he could not hide; 'it was a silly, vulgar business. I wish I had known of it beforehand.'

'He is a pleasant person,' she said gravely, 'so full of hidden talents; this evening quite repays me for trying to be good-natured, does it not? Ought I not to feel encouraged to persevere?'

Orme felt rather foolish, and chafed under it. 'I won't say anything—I can't,' he said; 'only I am sorry for him and—and others. Good-bye, Miss Chevening.'

Margot was driving with her mother two or three days after the concert, and the conversation fell, as it often did now, on the intolerable *gêne* of Allen's presence in the drawing-room night after night. 'I don't want to reproach you, sweetest,' said Mrs. Chadwick, 'but I quite counted upon having our evenings at least free from him, and suddenly, for no conceivable reason that I can see, you pleaded for him to come back again. I couldn't oppose it very well, but it was a mistake.'

'It was, dear,' said Margot wearily; 'I admit it. I will never do a disinterested thing again. Oh, that concert!'

'Don't talk of it. I should not be surprised—no, I should not—if people were to suppose *we* were in the secret of that terrible performance of those two creatures!'

'He actually proposed to bring Mr. Bilkins up and introduce him, burnt cork and all, at the end,' said Margot. 'I told him that I might astonish Mr. Bilkins if he dared to do anything of the kind. But surely people will not make us accountable for Allen's behaviour?'

'You saw how the Hothams behaved; depend upon it, this will go all over the county; no one will spoil the story by being too precise about his relationship to us; we shall be fortunate if we are not represented as dancing a family breakdown with blackened faces! And as long as he lives here we shall be in constant dread of being disgraced and humiliated from time to time. How can we expect people to keep up any relations with us? We shall be cut, I know we shall be cut before very long! If his father could only have been induced to send him out just for a year or two, to gain experience on that plantation of his in Bengal, *what* a good thing it would have been!'

'But can't he?'

'I did suggest it. I am sure, for Allen's sake, it would be so wise; but your step-father wouldn't hear of it; he means to sell the plantation, or "concern" as he calls it, as soon as he can; he doesn't care about Allen being a planter, he says. I saw it was useless.'

'Would he send him to college, mother? That would be better than nothing.' Margot recalled, as she spoke, Nugent's strong disapproval of such a course; she knew that she had allowed him to think her convinced by his arguments. But her patience was at an end. Nugent

might be mistaken; he had almost acknowledged as much; he could not blame her now for suggesting a plan which most people would consider an admirable arrangement for all concerned. Not that she intended to take any prominent part in the affair; she might leave that to others.

'If your step-father does not mind the expense, that really might be managed. I'm afraid he would not listen to me, though. I must take the vicar into our confidence and coax him to suggest it, it will come so much better from him.'

And, on the first opportunity, Mrs. Chadwick consulted the Rev. Cyprian Orme on the pain it gave her to see her step-son so unlike other young men. It was not long before the vicar, much to his own surprise, found that he had hit upon the sovereign remedy. 'A university!' Mrs. Chadwick had never thought of that. Why, it was the very thing; how very, very clever of dear Mr. Orme! How she wished she had asked his advice earlier! And *would* he speak to her husband about it? He would—*how* could she thank him!

The good-humoured, easy-going vicar assented readily enough; he thought that if anything could put a little polish on that highly objectionable young man, a course of university life was the most likely to succeed. He was a university man himself, as was his son, and had a strong belief in the value of the training. He was agreeably surprised by Mrs. Chadwick's interest in her step-son; he thought her a very charming and warm-hearted woman. Whether Allen was a fit person

to succeed or even hold his own in college society, he did not trouble himself to reflect; in fact, he was soon enamoured of an idea which he was already firmly persuaded was his own.

When he broached the subject to Chadwick, he found him not indisposed to consider it, for Mrs. Chadwick had carefully paved the way beforehand. Chadwick was rather attracted by the idea of sending his son to a university; it went some way to soothe him for past disappointment. 'I thought they had to be sent up young?' he said. 'Allen's not far off his twenty-second birthday; but, if you say it can be managed, why, it might be worth thinking about. How am I to set about it? Can they take him now, and when had he better go?'

This was a point that the vicar declared himself less competent to decide; his own college, Balliol, was unsuitable for obvious reasons. Allen must, he thought, go somewhere where the standard of admission was less exacting. He had lost touch with his Alma Mater of late, and knew little of the present regulations at other colleges. 'I tell you what,' he said, 'I'll get Fanshawe to find out for you; he's not long from Cambridge, and he's sure to know all about it—yes, I'll speak to Fanshawe.'

Having spoken to his curate and transferred the whole responsibility to him, the vicar dismissed the affair from his mind with a good conscience.

Fanshawe warmly recommended his own college. It was small and snug, and stood high in public estimation; he took the opportunity of mentioning some titled and distinguished members, all, it appeared, personal

friends of his own, who were up with him. He undertook to make all necessary inquiries at once. 'As for entrance,' he said, 'it isn't much of an exam. They don't make a point of your being a classical or mathematical swell. Of course, if your son has got a trifle rusty in his subjects, he might read up for them between this and October. I know a man who would read with him—ripping clever fellow he was—he'll take care your son gets through.'

Chadwick by this time was bent on making an undergraduate of Allen. He was necessarily dependent on the advice of those who were better acquainted than he with college formalities. The preliminaries were arranged by Fanshawe, who also, with some natural satisfaction at being able to do an old friend a good turn inexpensively, communicated with a Mr. Melladew, a man of his own year and college.

Mr. Melladew, having no better engagement just then, readily accepted the post of resident coach to Allen Chadwick, who saw all these arrangements made for him with bewilderment, and yet a secret expansion. If he really were to go to Cambridge to be a member of an ancient college, like Nugent, would not Margot think more of him when he came back? He was not clever, he knew, but he might succeed at Cambridge; was not Cambridge mathematical, and had he not always had a turn for arithmetic? Buoyed up by hopes of this vague kind, he refrained from raising objections, to which indeed his father would have been in no mood to listen with patience.

## CHAPTER VIII

### PRIVATE TUITION

Les personnes faibles ne peuvent être sincères.
*La Rochefoucauld.*

'HENNIE,' said Ida suddenly, a day or two after the arrival of the new tutor, 'will Mr. Melladew stay here long, do you think?'

She and Miss Henderson were alone in the schoolroom together, and Ida was supposed to be occupied in translating Molière.

'I'm sure I can't tell you,' said the governess; 'we have been at least an hour over this one scene, Ida!'

'It is such nonsense!' declared Ida; 'now *isn't* it, Hennie? Listen to this: "The Muphti" (chanting and dancing), "Ha la ba, ba la chou, ba la ba, ba la da!" I do think the "Bourgeois Gentilhomme" is the silliest rubbish!'

'I should not say it was silly, exactly,' pronounced the governess, with the enlightenment of a superior mind; 'it is certainly peculiar in parts, but we must always remember, Ida, that popular taste was very different in those days. Every properly educated girl is expected to have read at least *one* comedy of Molière's!'

'If such stuff as this is education!' said Ida disgustedly. 'But don't let's begin ha-la-ba-ing again just yet, Hennie; we've lots of time. I'm in a talking humour this afternoon. Weren't you saying something about Mr. Melladew? I think he's awfully nice, Hennie, don't you?'

'He seems to have agreeable manners,' said the governess.

'I wonder what his history is,' pursued Ida, resting her chin comfortably on her folded hands; 'I'm sure he has one. His eyes have such a mournful look in them sometimes. Perhaps he has lost all his money, Hennie, and has had to come down to teaching?'

'I am sorry you seem to consider teaching such a degrading occupation.'

'Teaching that horrid Allen is—you poor dear sensitive Hennie. Did you really think I meant anything else? How Mr. Melladew must hate it! He looked so tired when he came into the drawing-room last night; did you notice how white his hands are? I like that lazy way he has, as if it was not worth while to take much trouble about anything. He was talking to you quite a long time—did he tell you much?'

'Really, my dear child, you are very curious to-day—what should he tell me?'

'I mean, did he seem to think he should like being here?'

'It is rather early for him to form any opinion, and he could hardly tell me in any case.'

'No,' said Ida, 'I daresay he has made up his mind

not to stop already, though. Did he say anything about—about any of us—about me ?'

'Good heavens, no ! how could he ?'

'He must have thought me a perfect idiot. I said such stupid things when he spoke to me—he made me feel so shy, Hennie. Oh, well, I am going on with this old Molly.' And Ida began to translate monotonously —'"*The Muphti comes back, covered with his turban of ceremony, which is of an unmeasurable grossness—size,* then—*and garnished with candles lighted in four or five ranks*"—What r-o-t it all is. Fancy candles in a turban ! Suppose Mr. Melladew were to fall desperately in love with—with Margot ?'

'Or with you ?' suggested Miss Henderson ; 'it is quite as likely !'

'With me !' said Ida ; 'why, I'm only a school-girl to him, Hennie ; he won't take any notice of me. I should look quite grown-up, though, if I only had my hair done up like Margot's, instead of this stupid pig-tail.' And Ida went to the glass and began to unplait her hair and twist it up in imitation of Margot's. 'See, Hennie, no one would think me a school-girl if he saw me like this—oh, couldn't you get mother to let me keep it up ? It's ever so much more becoming, isn't it now ?'

'Vain child !' said Miss Henderson, her light-lashed eyes scrutinising Ida's pretty self-conscious face with a growing interest. 'Do you know I shall really begin to suspect——'

Ida was upon her in a moment, stopping her mouth

with kisses. 'You absurd old Hennie—as if I should be such a goose! Why, of course I know that's all ridiculous. I should like to know how it feels to have somebody madly in love with one. Isn't it rather amusing—no, not that—*romantic*, Hennie?'

'I can't give any opinion, really,' was the reply, delivered with much primness.

'How proper we are!' laughed Ida, 'as if we haven't talked it over ever so often. Why, you told me yourself you were engaged once, and broke it off.'

'Did I? You see even a poor little governess has moments when she longs for some sympathy. I have known what it is to be loved, Ida, but that is all over now. My heart,' declared Miss Henderson with a sentimental little sigh, 'is a waste; love will never bloom there for me again!'

'You poor darling! but tell me all about it; you never have, you know. What was he called? Was he handsome? Was he very much in love? He must have been—you are so pretty, though you *are* twenty-three!'

'You remind me,' said Miss Henderson, 'that, whatever my age is, you at least are too young to understand or to be told about these things.'

'Why, Hennie,' exclaimed Ida, looking aggrieved, 'I'm seventeen, and—and I'm sure we've talked about being in love often enough for me to understand—you *are* unkind to me to-day!'

But although Miss Henderson did not insist upon confining the conversation to Molière, nor even

discourage a vein of sentiment which both were pretty well accustomed to pursue, she was not to be drawn into particulars.

While governess and pupil were speculating on love in the abstract, varied, as conscience pricked them from time to time, by spasmodic returns to the classical French comedy, which they were less fitted to appreciate, Mr. Melladew was strolling leisurely down the village on his way to his friend Fanshawe's lodgings.

Adrian Melladew was the kind of young man who might naturally be expected to excite at least a flutter of interest in a romantic school-girl. He was about twenty-four, tall and slim, with dark eyes which he knew how to make expressive, and a mouth that, well-shaped as it was, was not remarkable for firmness. He wore his hair rather long and parted in the middle. He had a pleasant voice and a languid rather negligent manner. At Cambridge he had played heroines at the A. D. C. with signal success. He had not distinguished himself in any other way, affecting a certain gentle contempt for men who found amusement in violent exercise, and contenting himself with a low second class in the History Tripos. He was popular with the men of his set, played and sang a little, collected blue china, and entertained at his afternoon teas as well as any London hostess. After leaving Cambridge, he had gone up for the Home Civil Service and been appointed to a not over-remunerated post in the Revenue Department, eking out his salary by taking pupils. The monotony

and hopelessness of the office had proved too much for him at last; he had thrown up his appointment in despair, and lived as he could by editing school books, and acting as deputy lecturer for a friend at a ladies' college. The friend had returned, and, his engagement terminated, Melladew had written to Fanshawe to ask if he knew of anything that would suit him, and this the curate had borne in mind when appealed to by his ·ear.

Melladew found out the curate's abode, which was in lodgings in one of the little red-brick semi-detached villas that even Gorsecombe had not escaped from entirely. There were iron railings in front, and a rheumatic rustic porch, with a bed of scarlet geraniums, calceolaria, and lobelia neatly enclosed with flints before the little bay-window.

He discovered the curate stretched on a sofa with a novel, in a room whose decorative shortcomings were disguised as much as possible by sundry articles that belonged to his undergraduate existence—the well-known photographic groups with the college arms and names of members emblazoned below, carved work, shields, and so on. The shabby little sham-marble mantelpiece was draped with embroidered cloth, and college pewters stood on brackets here and there. Altogether the effect was not unlike the cheaper sort of out-college lodgings.

'I could fancy we were back in dear old Cambridge again,' murmured Melladew, as his eye wandered round the room; 'I never expected, though, when we both put

on white ties to take our degrees in, that yours would become chronic. You were more coloured than plain in those days, my dear Fanshawe.'

'Had to be a curate, or starve,' was the nonchalant answer; 'felt rather out of it at first. Never forget my first meeting with old Liversedge. I was crossing his land, and seeing him I thought it best to apologise. "Don't apologise," he said, looking like some sort of old goat, "I'm one of your lambs, you know!" I felt a fearful fool. But I'm getting used to it now. They're beginning to see I can sink the parson. And my vicar's a good sort. Now let's hear how you're getting on with these new people.'

Melladew looked slightly troubled as he passed his hand through his hair: 'Why, that's rather what I came to talk to you about. I'm afraid it won't do. I must give it up.'

'Why? You knew what you were letting yourself in for. I told you your pup was rather a bounder, and old Chadwick quite the bear—now didn't I?'

'He is a bear, and the boy's a cub,' said Melladew; 'I can't drive anything into his thick head. He's forgotten all he ever knew, except simple arithmetic, and I'm supposed to teach him algebra, and Latin prose and Greek, and trigonometry, all between this and October—it's hopeless, and I'd better tell them so and go.'

'Bindles, my dear fellow!' was the curate's inelegant comment. 'Sheer bindles.' If he can't learn, that's his affair—all the less work for you! Why should you throw away a chance like this? You won't get such

a fee everywhere. Don't tell me you're going to do anything so idiotic!'

'There's another reason,' confessed Melladew. 'Personally I should rather like to stay. Mrs. Chadwick's very civil, and the daughters, as far as I have seen, pretty and agreeable and all that——'

'Then if you'd rather like to stay, what's the objection? Hang me if I can see it!'

'Well,' he said reluctantly, 'did I ever tell you that I was once engaged? It was in my last vac., three years ago, now, and there was a girl who used to come and teach my young sister the piano, and I saw a good deal of her, and we corresponded and so on, and I suppose we considered ourselves engaged. Then my people found it out—that was after I came down, and they didn't take to her at all. So the governor put his foot down, and said if I married without his consent he wouldn't give me a penny.'

'A penny would not have gone far,' interjected the curate.

'He had the pull over me, because I owed a lot up at Cambridge. I owe some of it still, and I meant to get him to pay the more pressing fellows. What was I to do, you know? I couldn't marry then, anyhow, so I wrote and broke it off, putting it as gently as I could, and heard no more of it.'

'Well out of it, I should say; but I don't see how——'

'Of course you don't till I come to it. Well, my dear Fanshawe, this girl is the governess to the younger Chevening girls.'

'Whew! that's awkward. What did she do when you met?'

'She didn't do much, she was prepared for it; we met as strangers, but I can see that she hasn't forgotten it, and—and it's not very pleasant for me!' he concluded plaintively.

'Well, as long as she understands that it's all over——'

'But I'm not sure that I *want* it to be all over, and —and I'm afraid she does. We had a long talk the other evening; we had to be very guarded, of course, but she let me see that she thought I'd behaved like a brute, and so I have. She's twice as pretty as she used to be when I knew her, Fanshawe.'

'Why don't you make up to her again then?' suggested the Rev. Mr. Fanshawe.

'I—I don't like to,' said Melladew, with a slight shiver at the curate's phrase, which seemed to jar on his refined senses. 'She wouldn't stand that sort of thing now, and besides, look at me, unless anything happens to the governor, and he's good for any number of years, I'm dependent pretty much on what I can make. He'd cut me off, I know he would, if I married without his consent. And she's fond of dress, and extravagance even now. I daren't run the risk of making a fool of myself again.'

'Then do as you propose, throw up the pup and bolt,' said the curate yawning. 'I *don't* propose that,' was the reply, somewhat irritably spoken; 'I don't *want* to go if she doesn't make a point of it.'

'Stay, then; you needn't see any more of her than you can help, there's room enough for both of you. It's nonsense to throw away a good thing unless you're obliged to.'

'So it is,' said Melladew; 'I think you're right, Fanshawe, it would be a pity. And—and I can keep out of her way. I don't want to get her into trouble, poor little girl.'

Perhaps Melladew did not really require much inducement to remain under the roof that sheltered Camilla Henderson. He was fond of confidences, and, from his undergraduate days, had been in the habit of consulting Fanshawe in affairs of difficulty, often of his own manufacture. So he remained at Agra House, a course which Miss Henderson seemed very far from resenting. The situation gratified her taste for intrigue and mystery. As far as her shallow nature allowed, she had cared for him, and deeply felt his defection; she had a sense of triumph now, in knowing that she might re-establish her power over him if she chose. She intended to punish him a little first, and treated him, when they met, with the most complete indifference, ignoring all his overtures for a reconciliation. By these tactics, however, she effected rather more than she intended. Melladew acquiesced and began to avoid her, considering this, as he was as powerless to marry as ever, the wiser course. It was; but it did not suit Miss Henderson, who required the excitement of piquing and baffling him, and enjoying his penitent misery. If he would not trust himself near her, the situation would

become too stupid; she might forgive him, but she meant him to purge his offence first.

He evidently feared to make the first advances, and, owing to her position in the house, she dared not give him any open encouragement to seek her society. But there was Ida, who was already powerfully attracted by the good-looking young tutor she was ready to accept as an ideal hero of romance. Ida, who had shown such a suspicious interest in the French novel Miss Henderson had selected as a suitable means of improving her accent, 'Le Roman d'un jeune homme pauvre'—not the work, though unobjectionable in itself, which a most discreet person would have chosen under the circumstances. Ida's ill-regulated mind was quite precociously sentimental enough without a stimulant of this kind. Miss Henderson was not troubled with scruples. She meant no harm, but she worked upon and used Ida's school-girl admiration to further her own purposes. She encouraged her to talk constantly about this interesting young man, to pity his hard lot, his melancholy, while she was careful not to betray any sentiments of her own. 'He looks as if he would be so grateful to be taken more notice of,' she said; 'he watches you so wistfully sometimes when you're playing tennis, dear. Of course I can't interfere, but I don't think your mother would object if you asked him to take more part in our amusements—it would be a real kindness to him.'

Ida needed no pressing; on the first opportunity she timidly and with a beating heart asked Melladew

if he would join them at tennis, and it soon became an ordinary thing for him to meet and accompany them on various expeditions, or in their outdoor occupations, though always in a more or less unpremeditated manner.

Ida generally went out alone with the governess, and, as they did not think it necessary to tell Mrs. Chadwick how often a third person formed one of the party, she saw no reason for retracting her confidence in Miss Henderson. For Ida these meetings were full of a perilous bliss. Melladew treated her with a deference that increased her infatuation. She was only a child in his eyes, but he exerted himself to please and interest her by all his arts. It was all meant for Miss Henderson, who was still maintaining her demure reserve, but the poor child did not know that. He talked to her freely—always about himself, and the trials he had had, and the great things he meant to do some day, dropping hints, when he saw that they were not likely to offend, of the burden he found his present pupil. 'I can't tell you what terribly exhausting work it is,' he would say in his pathetic voice; 'I could not possibly endure it but for intervals of peace and rest like these.'

And Ida felt a deeper indignation against Allen for vexing her hero's soul by his crass stupidity.

'Hennie,' she said one day, 'you don't mind Mr. Melladew's coming with us like this, do you? You were so very stand-off-ish with him this afternoon.'

'I don't mind if it gives you pleasure, darling.'

'You dear, unselfish Hennie! it *does* give me

pleasure. He talks so delightfully, and—do you think it is any pleasure to him to come?'

'I think,' said the governess archly, 'you don't require me to tell you that. Where are your eyes, dear?'

'He does seem glad when he meets us.' Ida flushed with a shy pleasure. 'Oh, Hennie! he is so clever and handsome—he can't be glad to see me—and yet, what else *can* it be?'

'Vain little fool!' was the governess's inward comment, but what she said was: 'I must leave you to draw your own conclusions, darling. He does not honour me with much of his notice, does he?'

'That's because you are not very nice to him, Hennie,' said the unsuspecting Ida. 'I'm sure he has a great respect for you; it's only that he finds it easier to talk to me, I suppose. He does talk to you sometimes, too.'

'I must be grateful for small mercies, my dear,' was the answer, with a rather hard little laugh. 'I am perfectly contented.'

'Don't be bitter, Hennie. You don't believe in —in anyone being sincere now, do you? But I'm sure Mr. Melladew would be; he wouldn't say things he didn't mean, like that horrid wretch who treated you so badly!'

'If you have any love for your poor Hennie,' that young lady entreated quickly, 'don't talk to me of—of him. I hope Mr. Melladew will turn out a very different kind of person!'

Upon the whole Allen was becoming reconciled to

entering University life, though at first he had been very decidedly averse to leaving home. He did not want to go away from where Margot was, especially now that she was beginning to be less distant and abrupt with him. If Cambridge men were like Melladew (whom he loathed), he thought he should not be very happy at college. But he saw that he stood a little higher in his father's estimation than since his disgrace. Chadwick had caught eagerly enough at the idea of making his son an undergraduate; he had exaggerated notions of the social importance it would bring him to be able to talk of 'his boy at college,' and what it cost him to keep him there, and then his conscience was eased by repairing his early neglect. He even came to believe that, in some unformulated way, Allen would distinguish himself and be a credit to him yet. So, though he never completely recovered his former confidence, he was more genial in his manner to the boy.

In fact, the prospect of being shortly relieved from his presence had worked a wonderful improvement in the family attitude to him; particularly as he was closeted for several hours in the day with the tutor, who gave a favourable report of his industry.

'How is he getting on, hey?' Chadwick would ask at luncheon. 'Making a scholar out of him?'

'I think,' Melladew would answer, 'he ought to have no difficulty in passing in, sir.'

'Pass in—no. Why, they tell me that's a mere nothing at most colleges; but you'll have to work when you *are* in, Allen, mind that!'

But the subjects, though presenting no difficulty to anyone who had passed through the ordinary routine of a public school, seemed to Allen as impossible as the tasks set by some wicked witch in the fairy tales. How was he, with an education of the plainest commercial order, and a very imperfect recollection of that, to acquire in four months a working knowledge of two ancient languages, to construe Tacitus and Aristophanes, and turn passages of colloquial English into neat and elegant Greek or Latin prose? He tried in vain to grapple with the mysteries of the Eton Latin Primer and the Greek Grammar; his brain was dulled by hopeless attempts to master the simplest propositions of Euclid, or even the meaning and value of the algebraic signs.

'It's no use, Mr. Melladew,' he said one day; 'it's all a muddle to me, and so I tell you straight; I shall never learn all this rot.'

'I'm doing all I can for you,' was the careless answer; 'you must get as much into that head of yours as you can in the time, that's all. And, luckily for your chances, they're not as strict as they might be at Margaret Hall. They let in some pretty thick men in my time. Don't you worry yourself, and, look here, I'm going out for a stroll. You read over this chapter on the uses of οὐ and μὴ while I'm gone, and see what you make of it. I shan't be away more than an hour or so.' So saying, he leaped lightly out of the window, and disappeared for the rest of the afternoon.

Much of his teaching was conducted on this prin-

ciple, but his presence was of very little actual assistance to Allen, who much preferred him away. Mutual concessions were arrived at between them during the hours they had to pass shut up alone together. Allen found his tasks reduced to copying and re-copying certain indispensable mnemonic outlines of Melladew's own invention—tips, figures of propositions, arithmetical recipes, and so on, while the tutor smoked and polished triolets. He was loth to leave his present quarters, and consoled his conscience (for he had one, in a rather debilitated condition) by the reflection that, if he was not doing his pupil much good, he was keeping him out of mischief at all events. It was quite possible that he might be received without reference to his attainments at easy-going Margaret Hall; in any case, Fanshawe was right, there was no sense in quarrelling with one's bread and butter, a form of disagreement which, even in the most contentious breasts, is harder to provoke and easier to reconcile than most misunderstandings.

It seemed that the Hothams' hurried departure on the night of the concert was not, after all, caused by anything on the platform. Joceline fluttered up to Margot after church on the following Sunday and explained. 'Hope you didn't think me a wretch the other evening; but we had to run away, the atmosphere was too dreadful; poor mamma has not been out since. I hear your brother sang or did something after we left. I didn't know he was clever in that way.'

'Nor we,' said Margot, wondering whether this

ignorance could be real. 'It's so nice to meet people who can do things,' said Joceline; 'you sing so exquisitely. Mamma has raved about it ever since. She is coming over to call some day this week.'

And, what was more, Lady Adela not only did call but actually sent over a groom some days afterwards with an invitation to dine at Hawleigh. Allen was included, but Mrs. Chadwick made excuses for him on the ground that he was studying hard for Cambridge. 'I simply could not enter a room with that dreadful boy behind me,' she told her daughter. 'No, dear,' said Margot, 'if we must have our family skeleton, at least we won't drag it out to dinner with us. Thank goodness, he will be at Cambridge very soon now, and perhaps he will be more presentable.'

At the end of July, Reggie came home from school, greatly to the delight of Lettice, who was sadly in want of a playmate. 'I get on awfully well with the fellows, Lettie,' he informed her complacently; 'they know directly whether a chap's a cad or not. What do you think I heard Bigg Major say about me?—he's head of our house, and no end of a swell—he really said it, I heard it myself.'

'What *did* he say, Reggie?'

'Well, it was like this—he was with another sixth fellow, and I was passing, and he said, quite out loud: "Do you know who that fellow is?" And the other fellow said "No"; and then he said: "It's young Chevening; *he's not half a bad little squit*,"' and Reggie looked as

if he expected her to be overwhelmed by this magnificent tribute.

'But why aren't you half a bad little squit? I don't understand, Reggie.'

'Oh, it's no use telling girls anything!' said Reggie disgustedly; 'I thought you'd like to know. Who's that long-haired chap staying here?'

'Mr. Melladew—he's Allen's tutor; did you know Allen was going to Cambridge?'

'What's the good of sending *him* to Cambridge; he'll be a regular smug there, that's the word for a cad at Cambridge, you know. I suppose you think he isn't a cad, but then you don't know anything about it, you see.'

'I don't like him as much as I did,' Lettice confessed; 'he was not at all kind to me, and I haven't made friends with him yet; I don't think I shall.'

October came and Melladew took Allen up to Cambridge for his matriculation, having been charged to see him through it and provide him with all a newly-fledged undergraduate requires. Ida drew a sigh of profound relief. It was not her last parting with Melladew—he was to return when Allen was comfortably settled, Chadwick having prudently left the question of fees until he knew the result.

'Hennie,' said Ida, 'he will be back to-day. Oh, do you think he will go away again without ever telling me that he likes me a little? I care for him so awfully!'

Miss Henderson felt a certain uneasiness at the sight of the pale face and wistful eyes. She wished she could

have broken the truth, but, to prevent Ida from conceiving a dangerous jealousy, it had been necessary to encourage her in her delusion. She herself was still in doubt whether her own schemes would succeed—it was too ridiculous that this little chit of a girl should pose as a rival.

'You are very young, darling girl,' she said; 'you must be patient and wait, that is all I can say at present.'

'He has come!' cried Ida springing up. 'I hear wheels on the drive—yes, there is the old fly from the station, and he is getting out, and—and, oh, Hennie! what can have happened? Allen has just got out, too! What does it mean?'

'It means,' was the answer, 'that Mr. Allen has failed in his examination. How *very* disagreeable for poor Mr. Melladew!'

## CHAPTER IX

### DIFFERING CODES

Now I thought she was kind
Only because she was cold.—*Maud.*

MELLADEW on his arrival had gone at once to the library, where he found Chadwick engaged in examining a report from his agent in Behar. 'So you've got back, hey? Well, and did you leave him comfortable—get him everything he wanted?' Chadwick inquired, which made it all the more awkward for Melladew to explain that the tutor of Margaret Hall had declined to receive Allen as a member, and that the luckless youth was under the paternal roof at that moment.

The ostensible reason for his rejection had been his failure to make anything of the matriculation papers, but the tutors of small colleges are not always inexorable in the matter of scholarship if the candidate seems at all likely to distinguish himself and the college in other fields. It is to be feared that Allen's fate was really decided in the course of a private interview.

'When I engaged you,' said Chadwick, 'I looked to you to keep anything of this sort from happening.'

'It is very unfortunate, of course,' said Melladew airily; 'I only know I did my best for him.'

'Do you mean to say he wouldn't work?'

Melladew shrugged his shoulders. 'I would rather put it down to natural incapacity,' he replied.

'Oh, you would? Just send him in here, will you—and come back yourself.'

When Allen had appeared in all the consciousness of failure, his father began stormily: 'So they've kicked you out, sir; you can't even pass a trumpery entrance examination, that Fanshawe says any schoolboy could go through easily! It's your infernal unprincipled idleness, you know, that is! Mr. Melladew here tells me he did all he could for you, only you wouldn't work!'

Allen had had a great deal to bear for the last two days; he was smarting under the sense of deception and injustice, which found utterance at this.

'He says that?' he broke out thickly; 'he knows better! I told him again and again it was no use, and I couldn't make head or tail of the beastly things, and he said I needn't try, I should get through all right without troubling. He never took the slightest pains to help me; he never gave me a civil answer when I asked him to—he was always busy with his own writing!'

'That's the way you perform your duties, is it, Mr. Melladew? What have you to say to that?'

'Only that I undertook what I did not know till later was impossible.'

'And, sooner than give up and lose your money, you went on, and let me believe everything was going on well, and left him to take his chance? Thought

you'd pocket your money all the same, did you? Well, you'll find your mistake out, that's all! You won't get a farthing out of me, Mr. Melladew, without suing for it, and I shall give my reasons for refusing to pay, too, so you'd better think twice before you go into court. And you'll please to leave this house at once, there's an afternoon train you can just catch.'

'I will leave the house certainly,' said Melladew, with as much dignity as he could command, 'and as to the words you are pleased to use, I suppose I must make what allowances I can for a very natural disappointment.'

He did not take the train, however, but sought shelter with his friend the curate, who consented to put him up for a day or two.

'As for you, sir,' said Chadwick to his son when they were alone, 'I begin to see it's no use my taking any pains or going to any expense for you. You're a bad egg! I've tried to make a gentleman of you, but you'll never be anything but what I found you. You're a lazy cowardly hound, that's what you are, and I'll leave you in future to go your own way. I just warn you of this, that if I have any more trouble with you, I'll pack you off to India, where you'll be looked after and made to earn your own living. Now you can go!'

Allen was not long in obeying this fatherly admonition; he was profoundly miserable at his failure for the first day or two, but by-and-by he began to find a consolatory side to his situation. His brief experience of Cambridge had rather awed him; the glimpses of

manners and pursuits seemed so totally strange to him, the boys with an ease and manliness in their bearing that made him feel enviously inferior, the awakening stir of undergraduate life, with all its contrast of placid study and active exercise—bewildered rather than attracted him; he was depressed by the gloom and silence of the stately old colleges, and saw no place for him in either the work or play of the great university.

Save for the first sharp sting, when the college tutor with a grave kindliness had made him understand that it was not possible for Margaret Hall to admit him, he felt little regret at his exclusion. Now, at least, he would not be separated from Margot; he even comforted himself with the idea that she would pity his mishap.

Chadwick soon made his household aware of his latest disappointment; his wife indulged in a few sub-acid comments; Margot kept silence, though inwardly raging at the defeat of her plan at the moment when it bid fair to succeed. Now she must resign herself as best she could to the constant irritation Allen was to her nerves—she had taken little indeed by disregarding Nugent Orme's advice. Ida shed bitter tears when she was alone with the governess. 'He has gone away without a word to me! Oh, Hennie, he—he must mean to write, tell me you think he will!' she repeated again and again, and Miss Henderson had to calm her by giving the required assurance.

The morning after his return, Allen, with no impossible tasks to occupy him now, was wandering list-

lessly about the house and presently came upon Margot and Ida, who were filling some vases with autumn foliage, great amber fans of chestnut, and sprays of ruddy beech and crimson bramble, which they were arranging on a table in the hall.

'Let me help,' he said, glad of the opportunity to be near Margot, 'I've nothing particular to do.'

'You have done quite enough, I think,' said Ida, her pale cheeks reddening with anger; 'and we don't want your help, do we, Margot?'

'It's bad enough to have the governor always jawing at me,' he remonstrated, 'without *your* joining in! Margot won't be rough on me, I'm sure; it isn't as if I could help not getting into Cambridge.'

'You could help putting all the blame on other people, at least,' said Ida quickly.

'I'm not talking to you,' he retorted; 'we all know whose part you'd take!'

'Margot thinks just the same as I do—that you acted like a sneak, a horrid ungentlemanly sneak—don't you, Margot?'

Miss Chevening raised her eyes for a moment, and replied, 'Most decidedly I do.'

A sneak! This was an aspect of himself which had never occurred to him. Why was he a sneak? he wanted to know—what had they to say against him?

'You got poor Mr. Melladew turned out of the house, actually turned out in disgrace, because you made your father believe that he took no trouble with you, as if you deserved to have any trouble taken with

you!' said Ida, the branch she held quivering in her passionate grasp.

'It was true,' said Allen, 'he never troubled about me; he was out half the time he ought to have been with me, and, when he was there, he did nothing. Why was I to take all the blame, and he get off?—tell me that, Margot.'

'There was no reason why *you* should have done so,' she replied, with a calm disdain; 'only gentlemen do not act quite in that way, that is all.'

And she turned away, as if he was really unworthy of serious notice, and began to select her berries and wild-rose haws with leisurely fair hands.

This was more than he could bear just then, especially after his hopes of receiving her sympathy. 'Look here, Margot,' he said, 'I don't care what Ida chooses to say or think, but I can't stand *your* being against me—it knocks me over altogether. I—I've always tried to get your good opinion, you know I'd do anything to please you—I mean it—*anything*. I'll act like a gentleman, if you'll only teach me how. I've not been brought up in such ideas.'

In his earnestness he had forgotten that Ida was still in the hall, but she recalled him to the fact by a contemptuous laugh. 'I'm afraid you will want a good many lessons!' she said, as she carried off one of the finished vases. 'Margot, my dear, I wish you joy of your pupil.'

Allen sat down at the centre table, on which he leant his elbows. 'Margot,' he pleaded, 'you might

look at a chap. If I've acted so bad, tell me what a real gentleman would have done—some one like Orme, we'll say.'

She did not turn her eyes on him as he sat there, but her manner was distinctly gentler as she answered: 'Mr. Orme—any gentleman—would have borne anything rather than try to shield himself at another's expense. Just think how mean it is—it's exactly what sneaky little boys say at school: "If you please, sir, so and so was as bad as I was!" Do you really tell me that you don't see anything disgraceful in a defence like that. If you don't, you must be quite hopeless!'

'I do. I do now. I—I was so riled at being told I was idle, I said it without thinking. And listen, Margot, I promise faithfully next time I'll act better; you shall never have to say this of me any more.'

'Ah!' she said lightly, 'we shall see when you get another opportunity.'

She said this with her ambiguous smile as she left the hall; he stood for a moment there, and then went out into the grounds, consumed by one burning desire—that the opportunity she spoke of might come speedily.

Melladew's unceremonious dismissal had naturally made him more interesting than ever in Ida's eyes. He was her persecuted hero, and she brooded sadly on his sorrows and her own. She had come to believe, with all the fervour of a precocious romantic mind, that he was nobly suppressing his attachment to her, that pride alone kept him from speaking. As the days

went on and she heard nothing of him, the suspense told on her health and spirits, though she confided in none but Miss Henderson, who was always sympathetic and encouraging.

Ida broke down sometimes when alone, and it was after an outburst of this kind that Allen entered the schoolroom. 'Go away!' she said pettishly, 'this is our room, you have no business here.' She was turning her face from the light and drying her eyes furtively as she spoke.

'Why, you're crying, I declare!' said Allen, with all his customary tact.

'I'm not, then. So would *you* cry,' retorted Ida, 'if you had "Minna von Barnhelm" to translate.'

'That won't go down, Ida. *I* know who you're crying about—it's that tutor chap.'

'Allen!' cried the girl, startled past all dissembling, 'how did you know? It's not—not true. Why should I cry for Mr. Melladew?—why do you say such things to me?' To find her cherished secret surprised by the detested Allen caused her exquisite humiliation. He was much pleased by his own power of discernment.

'I've got my eyes open,' he said; 'I know who used to go with you on those walks.' She shrank back. 'You—you won't tell mother!' she cried.

'Ah, that's all you think I'm fit for!' he retorted bitterly; 'it would serve you right if I did, you're always going on at me. Look here, Ida, I'm not such a bad sort, and besides, it's all nonsense, this is. You

know he don't think anything about you, and, if he did, he isn't worth your caring for!'

'You know nothing about it,' said Ida; 'you have no right to speak against him now you have driven him away!'

'How far away do you suppose he is at this present moment, eh?'

'How can I tell? miles and miles—in London, I daresay.'

'Not he—he's never left Gorsecombe; he's been hanging about Paddock's Lane most afternoons. I've seen him there.'

Paddock's Lane was a narrow and unfrequented by-way which skirted the edge of the Agra House grounds. Ida's eyes sparkled. 'Oh, Allen, I'm sorry I spoke like that to you; tell me all about it—did he speak to you?—did he give you any message for—for anyone?'

'Now what should you expect?' asked Allen, unable to forego the amusement of teasing Ida.

'I—I don't know—oh, yes, I know there was a letter for me—give it to me, quick!'

'Well, you're just wrong, you see, Miss Ida, for there isn't. He didn't even mention your name. You know,' he said, 'I don't mean it ill-naturedly, I swear I don't, but you'd better give over any notions of that sort, you had really. Why, you're only a little girl; chaps his age don't think of school-girls in that way!'

He really meant well in his blundering fashion, but she naturally did not appreciate his good intentions. 'You say that because you hate me!' she sobbed, 'and

it's not true, I know it isn't. He *does* care for me—you shall never make me disbelieve in him. I won't listen to another word you say. I'm stopping my ears!'

'Just as you like,' said Allen, as he moved to the door. 'None are so blind as those that won't listen!' He felt unusually epigrammatic as he left the room.

Presently Miss Henderson came back; there was a conscious look on her face that did not escape Ida's sharp scrutiny. 'Hennie, where have you been? Why do you leave me alone every afternoon like this?'

'Why, you exacting child, mustn't I leave you alone for a moment?'

'It was nearly an hour.'

'I just ran out for a minute to see if I could find those two tennis balls. They had rolled under the Wellingtonia, Ida; now we've got all the twelve.'

'I don't care about tennis balls, I want truth, Hennie. You have seen him—oh, why do you pretend you haven't?'

'Him? oh, Mr. Melladew. Now, my dear Ida, what an idea!'

'If you are keeping anything from me, you will break my heart. Why are you so deceitful, Hennie? It's no use, that horrid Allen saw you,' she said, making a desperate venture.

Miss Henderson apparently decided that it was safest to admit the fact. 'You jealous little pussy,' she said affectionately, 'I've a good mind to punish you by not telling you a single word. I *did* see him—there!

I shall leave you to fancy why he wanted to see me, and whom our conversation was all about.'

'Oh, Hennie, forgive me, I am so happy. That hateful boy said such things. And so he does think of me! May I see him to-morrow? I do want to comfort him so.'

'Not for the world, my dear child! Have you gone *quite* mad? He would not hear of such a thing, he is far too high-principled. And, to tell you the truth,' continued Miss Henderson guardedly, 'just now, he feels a little sore about all this—he is so sensitive—he has got it into his head that you all despise him. If you knew the trouble I had to talk him out of it! No, you must leave this to me, darling; indeed it would not do for you to meet just yet. Besides, he is leaving to-morrow; his father is dangerously ill.'

'May I write to him? Say I may, Hennie!'

'Not at present—we must run no risks—a little note by-and-by, perhaps, slipped in one of mine. Ah, Ida, if we were only away where there were no prying spies to make mischief! You are really looking very unwell; I shall tell your mother what a few weeks at Bournemouth would do for you—you have had no sea air this summer, poor child!'

'And we will get away together!' cried Ida eagerly, 'you and I by our two selves, and if you could let him know, he would come, I know he would, Hennie; you will manage it all, won't you? There will be no harm if you are there, and I can't live without seeing him.'

'Leave everything to me,' said the governess, 'and—well—we shall see.'

'I am so pleased, dear Margot,' said Mrs. Chadwick one afternoon, some days later, 'it isn't as if it was going to be a tag-rag-and-bobtail dance at Hawleigh; all the county will be there, and there are sure to be some smart people coming down for it. Only I do wish you had something better to go in. I would telegraph up to Clémentine to do what she can for you, but there's so little time, and I really can't afford it.'

'I shall do very well, dear,' said Margot calmly; 'my *tulle* is almost new.'

'You must look as nice as possible. I must see if I can find some simple ornament of mine you could wear with it—unless your own are better?'

'That is very unlikely, mother, because I haven't any—well, unless you count that great ugly locket and cable Mr. Chadwick gave me, and I can't wear that. And you know I haven't much money to lay out on trinkets, have I?'

'I wish I could make you a better allowance, you poor child; it is a shame you should have no pretty things of your own; but though I agree that you can't possibly wear the locket, it is quite a valuable one; I hope you take care of it?'

'Oh, it's all right,' said Margot lazily, 'it's in one of the drawers of my dressing-table, I believe.'

'You shouldn't be so careless; you ought to lock up everything of that kind.'

'It is quite safe where it is.'

'Fact is, Margot wouldn't care a hang if it *was* stolen!' said Allen's voice from the archway; they were sitting in the dusk, and he had entered the further room unperceived during this conversation.

Mrs. Chadwick started. 'Really, Allen!' she remarked, 'I had no idea you were there; it *is* so unpleasant to have people coming in in that silent way; one doesn't feel safe in saying anything.'

'Generally you say I make such a row when I come in. You were only talking about this grand ball the Hothams are going to give, weren't you? I'm going.'

'You!' exclaimed Margot.

'Yes. Father says he won't go; he had enough of Lady Adela when he dined there, and as I'm invited, he says I can be useful for once. I shan't be in your way, Margot.'

'Oh, dear no! Why shouldn't you go if you want to? You'll find it rather slow, though, if you don't dance, won't you?'

'Oh, I shall hop about somehow; perhaps you won't mind giving me a turn or two, Margot.'

'I object to being hopped about with. I think you must look out for a more vigorous partner, Allen.'

'If I don't dance with you, I shall dance with nobody.'

'How selfish! Shall you waltz about in solitude, or what?'

'Now you're chaffing. I don't mind your taking a rise out of me, you always do it good-temperedly.'

'I am good-temper personified; but it was merely

curiosity to know how you would manage to pass your time if you don't mean to dance?'

'I shall get on all right; don't you fret about me,' was the phlegmatic answer.

Miss Henderson had not found it difficult to get Mrs. Chadwick to see that Ida needed a change, though it was less easy to gain Chadwick's approval.

'It isn't the money,' he said, 'but I don't notice that she looks any different from her sisters—it's all fancy, Selina, or else that Henderson girl wants a change herself.'

'Ah,' said Mrs. Chadwick, 'it is easy to see that Ida is not your daughter! I never hear of your refusing Allen anything.'

'There you go!' he said; 'I never said I wouldn't pay, did I? I've never set up any distinctions. And as to not refusing Allen, there you're all wrong, as it happens! I told him two days ago he'd have to be content with a smaller allowance in future, and he needn't expect me to pay his debts. If he likes to drive about with a set of riff-raff to race meetings and pigeon-matches, he may for what I care, but he won't find me supplying him with money to throw away on betting, and so I've told him plainly.'

'Well, Joshua, Ida doesn't waste her money in that way, poor child, and she really ought to go.'

'Then let her go. Only a fortnight, mind; that's quite enough to set right anything that's the matter with her.'

It must be owned that Ida had been looking much brighter and more animated of late—a result to which certain messages extracted from Miss Henderson's correspondence had perhaps contributed. But the victory was won, and she and the governess were despatched to Bournemouth.

As the fortnight was near expiring, the reports became a little disquieting. Ida was not gaining strength quite so fast, Miss Henderson feared; it would be cruel to remove her for at least another fortnight.

Chadwick fumed at this. 'I am sick of this dashed nonsense!' he said roughly. 'I don't believe there's anything wrong with the girl—all fancy! If it's necessary that's another thing; but how am I to know that it isn't all eyewash?'

'Would you mind letting Margot go over for a day or two? You can trust her to decide whether Ida is really ill or not.'

'Well, that's not a bad plan. You can send her if you like. How soon can she go?'

'As soon as this dance at Hawleigh is over; she really ought not to miss that, Lady Adela has been so very kind.'

'Settle it among yourselves,' said Chadwick; 'I only want to know where I am.'

Margot was very ready to go for more reasons than one; she was anxious about Ida, and was growing more distrustful of the influence the governess had acquired over her. Margot was deeply devoted to Ida,

and was more than a little jealous at finding herself no longer foremost in her sister's heart as she had once been.

The evening fixed for the dance at Hawleigh Court arrived, and Allen was waiting in the hall of Agra House until Margot and her mother made their appearance. Margot was the first to come down, and as she came slowly down the stairs, fastening her long gloves, she looked fair enough to turn stronger heads than his. He stood there looking up at her, deprived of words for the moment. She was always beautiful to him, but he thought she seemed more hopelessly far above him than ever; and yet this was his step-sister; he saw her every day; he was going to a ball in her company—he felt thrown back into the old state of delightful but half incredulous bewilderment.

'Are you criticising?' she asked carelessly.

'I—I was thinking how jolly you looked,' he said stupidly; 'I wish you'd let me button your glove for you, or—or something.'

'Thank you, I won't trouble you; I prefer to do all that myself.' She was taking in his appearance with even more that her usual disapproval. Poor Allen was not one of those fortunate persons who appear to advantage in evening dress, and the satisfaction which the last glance at her glass had given her was dashed now by the prospect of appearing in public with such an escort.

'What a very remarkable bow!' she observed; 'it looks as if you had been *worrying* it.'

'I can't tie the beastly thing,' he said; 'will you do it for me, Margot?'

She shook her head. 'I think it has earned the right to be let alone now, poor thing!'

Here Mrs. Chadwick joined them. 'Tell Topham we are ready, please, Masterman. Allen, I hope you have a warm coat, because the carriage will not hold three inside with any comfort; there is plenty of room on the box.'

So on the box Allen had to go, a circumstance which he had not foreseen; he had looked forward to the drive in the carriage, with Margot sitting opposite, as the only inducement for going at all, but he did not venture to oppose his step-mother's decree.

The night was cold and rather foggy, but Mrs. Chadwick lowered the window, complaining that she had had a headache all day, and that the air would do her good. She would not hear of going back, however, declaring that it was nothing, and would pass off as soon as they arrived. It would have needed a very serious indisposition indeed to force Mrs. Chadwick to have the horses' heads turned homewards just then. So a little later they were slackening their pace and taking up their position in the file of vehicles, and the carriage-lamps were lighting up the ivy and rough stonework of the gateway, and casting a desultory glimmer on the trim shrubs and laurels as they drove up to the Court.

The fine old hall, with its broad staircase and gallery and black and white pavement, was crowded; the dresses of the women as they passed through

making a play of delicate colour amongst the massed greenery and under the grim old suits of armour.

Margot found that she would not be condemned to a purely contemplative form of enjoyment; several young squires and younger sons who had recently made the Chadwicks' acquaintance sought her out through the crush, and she very soon had more engagements than could be fulfilled in any one evening.

Some of her partners, smart young men in much request at big houses at that time of year, who thought dancing a decided bore after shooting all day, found a waltz with Miss Chevening so far from boring as to conceive a very strong desire to repeat the experience. For Margot, her partners were a mere succession of shirtfronts, they all danced at about the same level of languid excellence, they were insipidly handsome and correctly unentertaining. She caught herself wishing now and then for a glimpse of Nugent Orme's square keen face in the crowd, but he was abroad, she knew from Millicent, taking evidence on commission for some case he was engaged upon. However, she enjoyed her evening, she liked the very evident admiration she excited, she was not *blasée* enough to be indifferent to the sensation of circling to that admirable music on that excellent floor; it was pleasant, too, between the dances to wander along the panelled corridors or sit in the lantern-hung orangery, even if her companion for the time was not particularly interesting.

So it happened that many dances went by before she noticed that her mother was no longer in the place

where she had left her. 'So sorry about your mother, dear Miss Chevening!' said Lady Adela; 'such a pity —oh, nothing to be alarmed about—a mere fainting fit. You didn't know? I suppose she wouldn't let anyone tell you about it.'

'Where is she? let me go to her at once, Lady Adela, please,' pleaded Margot.

'Why, my dear, I expect she is at home by this time; dear Dr. Seaton thought she had better go as soon as she was able, and very kindly took her home in his own carriage. There is not the least need for you to desert us yet. Your brother will take care of you.'

'I think I should like to go at once if I may. If I had only been told, I might have gone with her; I shall be miserable till I know how she is.'

'I will send down to have your carriage brought up then, if you are bent on going,' said Lady Adela, 'but I assure you she was almost herself again when she left.'

The next thing was to find Allen, and Margot begged her partner to help her in searching for him in the various rooms. 'Not in any of them!' said the young man; 'then, I tell you what, we'll draw the place where the ices and things are—wonder we didn't think of that.' There was the usual buffet set out in one of the morning rooms, deserted just now.

'No one there!' said her partner, 'no one, that is, who looks like——' he was always grateful he never finished that sentence, for Margot, with a slight flush, said: 'Thank you—that *is* my step-brother, and now

I really mustn't keep you from your dance any longer.'

Allen had retired to the buffet some time ago; he was tired of being wedged and elbowed and politely anathematised by the well-dressed crowd, on whose feet and trains he trod, so, feeling rather forlorn at the prospect of the hours that must pass before he could go home, and the long cold drive outside, he was consoling himself with champagne, when, at a light touch on his arm, he turned and saw Margot. 'What, you'll give me a dance after all?' he cried; 'all right—I'm ready.'

When he heard what she wished, he obeyed with alacrity, her mantle and wraps were soon recovered and the carriage brought up, Sir Everard came forward to put her in, and Allen got in after her and took the opposite seat. 'No, I don't want to smoke,' he said, in answer to the suggestion which was all she could venture to make with Sir Everard and a crowd of footmen on the steps, 'I'm coming inside this journey.'

She felt powerless, in spite of her disinclination for his society, just then; the door was shut, Sir Everard stepped back, and the carriage rolled off.

## CHAPTER X

### THE LAST STRAW

She should never have looked at me if she meant I should not love her!—*R. Browning.*

O beautiful creature, what am I
That I dare to look her way?—*Maud.*

THEY drove on past the long line of waiting carriages, Allen with a glad surprise at his own good fortune. They two were alone together; the light from the lamps fell faintly on her face, framed in a dainty hood, as she leaned back, her half-closed eyes gleaming through their lashes, her lips slightly parted. The champagne he had taken had been just enough to conquer his usual diffidence, and make him more susceptible to her beauty than he had ever been before.

'This is jolly,' he began, 'being alone with you like this! I hardly ever see you alone now, Margot. You don't mind our being alone together like this, do you?'

'You might remember,' she said, 'that but for mother's illness we should not be alone like this.'

'It was only a faint—you aren't worrying about that, Margot? she'll be all right when we get home.'

'If only we were there!' she exclaimed; 'I shall be wretched till I know!'

She looked the more bewitching in her distress,—he lost his head altogether. Had not Bob Barchard said once that boldness was the only way to win a woman? How did he know that she might not have been fond of him all this time? He felt bold enough to-night to try his luck—when would he have a better chance?

'Margot,' he said, 'don't look so unhappy—let me comfort you!'—her eyes were wide open now—'I must tell you,' he went on rapidly, 'I can't bear you to be wretched, because—oh, Margot, I love you—I've always loved you—tell me you like me a little!'

She shrank back into the corner of the carriage: '*You!*' she cried faintly—'oh, you don't know what you are saying—you can't—it's too absurd! Allen, have you gone mad? let my hands go!'

He had caught her soft hands and held them tight. 'I am mad if you like,' he said hoarsely; 'I do love you, and—whether you like it or not—you can't prevent me. I love you, I love you!'

Before she could free herself he had kissed her passionately on the lips, and then, suddenly recovering his senses, recoiled in terror at his own audacity. He had kissed 'fair Rohtraut' with a vengeance, but he could not find any reason to congratulate himself upon that just then.

It was some time before Margot could command her voice. If the gardener's boy had presumed to offer her such an indignity, she could scarcely have been more

utterly surprised or felt more deeply humiliated. 'You coward!' she said at last, 'how dare you . . . how dare you! What have I done to deserve this?'

'I—I couldn't help myself,' he stammered. 'I—I don't know what made me do it.'

'Pull that checkstring at once,' she said imperiously.

Completely subjugated now, he pulled it without a word; the carriage stopped as she let down the window. 'Topham, Mr. Allen wishes to sit outside,' she said.

'Margot!' pleaded Allen, 'I won't——'

'You will be kind enough to get out at once,' she said, 'unless you wish me to walk home.'

He obeyed, and drove home on the box with Topham in a state of mind very far from enviable; and Margot, as soon as she was safely alone, relieved her feelings in a fit of passionate crying—this last shock, coming upon the excitement and her anxiety on her mother's account, had been too much for her overstrung nerves.

There was no trace of this weakness, however, in Miss Chevening's manner when they arrived, and she questioned Masterman eagerly as to her mother's condition, which absorbed all her thoughts for the moment. Fortunately, what he had to tell was reassuring: his mistress had instructed him to give Miss Margot her love, and she was much better and would see her in the morning. Then the butler locked up and retired, leaving Margot and Allen in the hall. She stood there in stately offence; he looked, as he felt, abject. At last, timidly, as though he feared whether he would be per-

mitted to render her even this prosaic service, he lighted one of the candles, and she took it without looking at him. At another time she would have felt the ridiculous element in the situation, but just then her resentment mastered all sense of humour; she went upstairs without deigning a word. He followed her humbly. 'Margot,' he said in an agitated whisper, 'tell me just this—what do you mean to do?'

'How do I know?' she returned over her shoulder.

'If my father gets to hear of—of this, he's as likely as not to pack me off to India!' he said gruffly; 'he swore he would if I didn't behave better. Margot, you—you won't get me sent away, will you?'

She was at the head of the staircase now, and faced him with white cheeks and burning, wrathful eyes. 'Don't speak to me,' she said. 'You had better not for your own sake!' And without another word, she left him, and went down the corridor to her own room.

How was she to act? Little as he imagined it, Allen's hint about India had been the very worst plea he could have used. Ah, if he could only be got rid of in that way! But then her step-father would have to be told—he was capable of pooh-poohing the whole thing, of making it a subject for his powers of heavy raillery—no, the very thought made her hot with shame. If he took it seriously and executed his threat of banishing Allen, she knew that she had little to hope from his discretion, he was not likely to make any secret of the reason. But she felt very certain that he would not consider Allen's conduct a reason for sending him away.

By complaining she would only publish and perpetuate an indignity she would willingly forget.

She found her mother very much her usual self when she went to her room next morning.

'So horribly stupid of me to faint like that!' she said. 'I've been rather overdone lately. I do hope you weren't frightened, darling; I wouldn't have you told; you see, Dr. Seaton kindly went home with me. It wasn't like leaving you quite alone, was it?'

If Mrs. Chadwick had not so plainly recovered, Margot would have forborne to distress or excite her; as it was, she could not refrain. 'If I had been alone, I should have been spared a great deal!' she said bitterly. 'Oh, mother, if I tell you, you must never speak of it to—to my step-father—promise!'

'You may trust me,' said Mrs. Chadwick. 'I am not in the habit of telling your step-father of your private affairs—tell me.'

'It was Allen—we were coming home in the carriage, and he—he made love to me! he did, indeed, mother—he dared to kiss me!'

Mrs. Chadwick drew from Margot the whole story. 'I am as angry as you are, darling, every bit,' she said, when she had heard it all; 'that wretched boy! But I agree with you; we must keep it from your step-father —it would be too dreadful if this were to get about!'

'And must I go on living in the same house with him, as if nothing had happened?' cried Margot. 'Oh, mother, if only I could leave it—or he!'

'Well, you are leaving to-day for a short time, and

you must have patience for a little while. His father grows more and more disgusted with him every day; it would take very little to decide him to send him away, but we must wait for a better opportunity than this; he might only laugh at us, Margot.'

'Yes,' said the girl, shivering. 'I know—I know. I only told you because—oh, how hateful it all is! If it would only end somehow—and soon!'

'Ah,' said her mother, 'that is too much to hope for.'

Margot was to leave for Bournemouth by a mid-day train, so that she had only just time, after a long consultation with her mother, to make her preparations for the journey. She was to travel without a maid, and Miss Henderson had arranged to meet her on her arrival.

The first person she saw upon the Gorsecombe platform was Allen, who had been hanging about there in a state of miserable uncertainty; she frowned in displeasure as he came up to her; it was their first meeting that day.

'It may relieve your mind,' she said contemptuously, 'to hear that your father will know nothing of what happened last night—some things are too disagreeable to be told.'

He could not help betraying his relief. 'God bless you, Margot!' he said; 'you shall never regret it—never! And—and I wish I had died before offending you like I did!'

'You were not asked to die—your only excuse is that you did not know what you were doing; now never

speak to me—to anyone—of this again. Let us both try to forget it.'

'Then you forgive me?' he said. 'Ah! I don't deserve it. I know I acted like a cad, like a rough brute as I am, but you'll give me a chance some day of showing I'm not ungrateful to those that treat me kindly—you'll do that, Margot?'

'I make no promises, and here is my train.'

She gave him a cold little nod as the train moved on; there was even a smile on her face, constrained, but still a smile; he saw the train recede down the line and watched till it was out of sight, then he turned away with a lighter heart. She had forgiven him—it was not hopeless yet—he was not to be banished from her presence, he might yet wipe out the recollection of last night! He was impatient for her return, when he might begin to win back her favour.

On her arrival at Bournemouth, Margot found Ida and Miss Henderson established in very comfortable rooms in a villa overlooking the Public Gardens. As far as looks were concerned, Ida seemed quite restored to her usual self, but there seemed a constraint and a want of cordiality in her manner to her elder sister which wounded Margot deeply, though she was too proud to show it.

'There is a very nice bed-room upstairs for you,' she said. 'Hennie, will you show Margot her room?'

'For the short time we shall be here, I could have shared your room, Ida.'

'No, you couldn't, Margot,' returned Ida quickly, 'unless you want to turn poor Hennie out.'

'Indeed,' said Miss Henderson, 'I will move to the other room at once if you would rather share Ida's, Margot.'

'You seem in a great hurry to get away from me, Hennie!' said Ida with a pout.

'Oh, pray don't let me disturb you,' said Miss Chevening, biting her lip. 'I will take the upstairs room—anything.'

It was not until the next day that she and Ida had anything approaching an explanation. They were walking together along the sands under the Boscombe cliffs; it was a bright November morning, with a mild sun and a keen wind, which blew the sea foam like drifting shreds of wool over the sparkling brown sand. Miss Henderson had declined to accompany them. 'You will have so much to say to one another,' she had said, and, somewhat to Margot's surprise, Ida had supported this warmly.

'Let us two go quite alone to-day, Margot,' she had said; 'Hennie won't mind for once!'

Yet, now that Margot and Ida were alone together, Ida's replies were brief and charged with a resentful antagonism which the elder sister noticed at last.

'Considering that you were so anxious for us to be alone together,' she said, 'you don't seem to have much to say to me, Ida!'

Ida stopped and began to prod the soft masses of chocolate and puce clay at the foot of the cliff with her sunshade. 'What is there to say?' she asked in a muffled voice.

'Don't be a goose, Ida. If I have done anything to

offend you, let us have it out now. I can see very well that you are not exactly pleased to have me here.'

'Because I know why you've come—to take me back with you. You think I am all right again; perhaps you don't believe there ever was anything the matter with me?'

'I don't think you are much of an invalid now, dear, at all events; and, indeed, I'm afraid you must make up your mind to return soon.'

'How soon?'

'Well, the day after to-morrow at furthest.'

'Margot, I can't, I won't go so soon! You—you don't understand how it is! Oh, let me stay a week—only one week!'

'You have some reason for wanting to stay? Is it anything at home, Ida? Come, can't you trust me?'

'Is it likely I should want to go back and meet that hateful Allen? Oh, Margot, he hates me! You won't believe it because he is always different with you—you can manage him; but if you knew how miserable he makes me—and it will be worse than ever now—it will drive me mad to go back without—unless—things are better!'

'They shall be!' declared Miss Chevening indignantly; 'you poor Ida, what you must have suffered! He is too utterly despicable for you to mind him, but at least I will put a stop to it in future. If I contrive for you to stay just one more week, will you be brave and come back then? I promise you that he shall not annoy you again, I will answer for that, and perhaps he

will not trouble any of us very much longer. Only be a little patient!'

'A week!' cried Ida. 'It is all I want, Margot; you are a darling, and I am so sorry I was cross to you!'

'So was I, dear,' said Margot, 'because I can do more for you than all the Camillas in the world—if you would only believe it!'

'I do now, only don't speak against Hennie, because I can't bear it. Nobody knows what a friend she has been to me—nobody, Margot! And I have been so horribly miserable, dear!'

Margot placed her firm protecting arm round her sister's slight form; her eyes were very bright and angry as she spoke. 'If I had known!' she said—'but I will find a way to punish him yet, darling; leave it all to me!'

It never occurred to her that Ida had not stated the real reason for her objection to leave Bournemouth, or that she had exaggerated Allen's clumsy and not ill-natured banter into a vaguely malicious persecution. In her prejudice Miss Chevening was willing to believe everything that was bad against her detested step-brother. He deserved no quarter at her hands, and when her opportunity came, he should receive none.

So the two sisters came to a better understanding, and Margot returned from her walk possessed by a fierce indignation, in which some personal feeling entered, against her sister's tormentor. 'Is there no way,' she asked herself passionately—'no way to get rid of him?'

Miss Chevening's meditations, wild and vague as they were, boded little good to the unconscious Allen, who was at that very time consoling himself by the thought that he was forgiven, and preparing by long and patient service to touch at last the heart of his disdainful lady.

Allen found the days long and blank during Margot's absence at Bournemouth. Without her the one excitement and object of his life was lacking. Of Lettice he saw but little now; the estrangement between them had never been quite healed, her childish faith in his goodwill had been too sorely shaken, and she obstinately declined to return to the old comradeship. And though her lessons were at a standstill, she spent most of her time with her mother.

His father had taken some shooting in the neighbourhood which kept him from being much at home during the day, rather to Allen's relief, for the return of the hunting season had revived Chadwick's rancour against his son. 'Hounds are to meet at Ramshott Heath at eleven to-day,' he said one morning at breakfast, after glancing at the notice he received as subscriber to the Hunt. Allen judged it prudent to make no remark, which irritated his father. 'If you'd had the pluck of a rabbit,' he said bitterly, 'you might have been going with the best of 'em by this time, instead of loafing about doing nothing. It makes me downright sick to see a young fellow of your age with absolutely no idea of amusing himself!'

'It isn't easy to amuse yourself,' said Allen rather sullenly, 'when you're not allowed any money.'

'You were allowed money enough to begin with—and a pretty use you made of it! You'll have no more, I can tell you, till you show you're fit to be trusted. I've got too many expenses as it is, without giving you money to be flung into the gutter. But there—it's no use troubling about you. I did think once I should make something of you, but you've cured me of that long ago—go your own way!'

Such speeches as this left Allen with a stubborn sense of ill-usage. Was it his fault that he was ill suited to a country life? As far as he could, he was trying to mend his ways and avoid bad courses for the future, but he had no means of employing his time except by wandering aimlessly about in all weathers, longing for Margot to come home—it was not dull when she was there.

'If it wasn't for somebody, Susan,' he said in one of the confidential talks which had now become frequent, 'I couldn't stand it—you know who I mean by somebody.'

Susan's vanity led her to misinterpret him—he had never spoken half so plainly before; he only needed a little encouragement.

'I dare say I could give a guess if I chose to try,' she said, with a fairly successful show of indifference.

'I thought you must have seen it. And, I say, do you think some day—not now, you know—I shall have any chance with her—*do* you, Susan?'

'A girl has her feelings—you can't expect to be met half-way. Nor it isn't likely anyone will have much to say to you while you let yourself be treated as a nobody in your father's house. Still, I may tell you this much—you'll never get anything if you don't ask for it!'

He was disappointingly dense. 'It's no use askin, yet,' he said; 'I only wanted to know what you thought, and so long as you say there's some hope I can wait.' And he turned and left her to extract what comfort she might from this hint of his intentions.

After all, Susan felt confident that she could induce him to commit himself to an unequivocal declaration whenever she chose. He was a poor creature, it was true; she did not care for him in the least, but it might be worth her while to gain a hold over him for all that. She was not even sure that she would refuse to marry him, as he was—his father would *have* to do something for them then.

Allen, little thinking of the hopes he had unwittingly encouraged, was walking aimlessly along the Closeborough road, when he heard wheels behind him and presently Bob Barchard overtook him and stopped his cart.

'You'll excuse me for addressing you,' he began, with mock respect, 'you having rather given me the go-by, so to speak, since you took up with going to college, though I did hear tell as that wur all off, too. However, I'm not fit company for a young gentleman of your quality. I know that—you needn't get so red in the face over it neither. What I wanted to see you

about was this: I've got something I was to give you when nobody was by. Came a matter of two days ago. I s'pose whoever sent it thought you and me was as thick as thieves still. I've been carrying it about with me ever since, on the chance of running up against you. It's a letter. There you are. Now my part's done—unless you'd like to step up and take the reins a bit.'

But Allen did not accept this invitation as he would once have done. 'No, thanks,' he said awkwardly, as he took the letter, 'I've no time for that to-day.'

'Ah,' said Bob, 'you've grown too genteel—that's what it is! Ain't you going to read your love-letter, and see who the young woman is that's gone and got sweet on you?'

'I'm in no hurry,' returned Allen, who was longing for him to drive on.

Barchard walked his mare for some time, until he realised that Allen did not intend to gratify his curiosity. 'Well,' he said at length, 'I see you've got grander in your notions lately. We go to the Vicarage now, 'stead o' the White Lion, and we turn up our nose at old friends. Can't say as I shall fret much over that—you ain't much loss in the way o' company, fur you never had pluck enough for a downright lark. I'm not one to force myself on nobody, I'm not, so I'll leave you to see what's inside o' that billy dooks. Come up, old mare.'

As soon as he had gone, Allen drew out the envelope and examined it, without immediately breaking the seal that fastened it. It was marked 'Private—to

be delivered when alone,' in a bold and yet hurried hand that seemed familiar. His heart gave a leap as he tore open the paper and glanced at the signature—it came from Margot!

For a moment he almost feared to read this letter—the first he had ever had from her. It was wonderful enough that she should write at all—did she mean to retract her forgiveness? But no conjecture of his could have prepared him for what he read—he had to read and re-read before he could believe his eyes.

For this was the letter:—

'Madeira Villa, East Cliff, Bournemouth.

'My dear Allen,—Do you remember saying once that you would do anything for me if I asked you? You can do something for me now if you only will, something that nobody else can. It is this. I want you, without letting anyone know, to go to my room, and get the locket and chain your father gave me. It is in one of the drawers of my wardrobe. Then sell it; you said once it was worth 15*l.*, but get as much as you can and send the money to M. C., Post Office, Bournemouth. Whatever you do, don't let anyone see you, and send it soon, or it will be no use. You must do this and keep my secret faithfully from everyone. Even to me, I wish you to behave as if this had not happened, and not to speak of this until I give you leave. Remember, I am trusting you.

'Margot.'

'P.S.—Destroy this.'

It is difficult to describe the effect this letter had upon Allen. Margot was in some trouble—and it was to him she came! The opportunity he had been longing for had arrived! What need she could possibly have for obtaining money with all this secresy, he scarcely allowed himself to speculate. It was enough for him that she had chosen him to do her this service. She should find that she had not made an unwise choice. He was sure he could get the locket without attracting suspicion; it would not be difficult to take it over to Closeborough and dispose of it there. At least, he was not clever enough to foresee any possible difficulties here, though he would not have shrunk from them if he had.

The one redeeming point in his weak and narrow nature was the devotion he felt for Margot. In a moment of excitement, it is true, it had found a coarser expression, but in spite of that one outburst of blundering brutality, the fact remains that his passion was a purer and more disinterested sentiment in the main than might have been expected.

The letter calmly ignored any risk he might expose himself to by obeying such a request; and if he thought of the danger himself, it was only to be glad that some amount of courage and prudence was necessary. It made her selection of him the greater honour, would give him a stronger claim to her gratitude.

Her gratitude! The thought of the new and confidential relations that would exist between them henceforth swelled his heart with a delicious joy and pride.

He had been looking forward with dread to the time that must pass before he could regain her full confidence, and now she had given him proof that it was restored already.

Was he a fool in feeling no hesitation, in entertaining no doubt or suspicion of the motive that might prompt such an appeal? Perhaps; but it was at least a folly of which he had no reason to be ashamed.

# Book IV

*As that ungentle gull the cuckoo's bird*
*Useth the sparrow.*—Hen. IV., Pt. 1, a. 3

## CUCKOO TACTICS

# CHAPTER I

## CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

Il y a des gens de qui l'on peut ne jamais croire du mal sans l'avoir vu ; mais il n'y en a point en qui il nous doive surprendre en le voyant.—*La Rochefoucauld.*

WHEN his first exultation had subsided, Allen set his thoughts to work out the best plan for obtaining the locket without exciting notice. He had no time to lose, and before he had reached home he had already decided that the best hour for his purpose would be as soon after luncheon as possible, when Mrs. Chadwick would be in the drawing-room and all the servants below at dinner. At luncheon both his step-mother and Lettice (his father was away shooting) remarked an unusual pre-occupation and nervousness in his manner, which, being a poor dissembler, he had not skill to conceal. 'I don't expect Margot back for some days,' said Mrs. Chadwick in answer to a question. 'Why? have you any reason for asking?'

'Reason?' he stammered as if her eyes were reading his secret; 'no, I—I only asked.' And he relapsed into silent confusion for a time, and then tried to open a conversation with Lettice, with a boisterousness which that young lady treated with a grave wonder.

He waited for some little time after they had left

the room, until he might assume that the coast was clear, and then he stole softly upstairs and went down the corridor to Margot's room. At the door he paused in a sort of involuntary reverence, like some barbarian invader on the threshold of a deserted sanctuary; there was such an air of dainty freshness in this room which seemed impressed strongly with Margot's personality; he entered almost apologetically, and had to remind himself that he was only carrying out her wishes before he could muster courage to begin his search.

Fortune favoured him; nothing was locked except the wardrobe, and in that the key was left; he pulled out drawer after drawer, forgetting everything in his eagerness, until at last he found the triangular morocco case containing the locket and chain.

He slipped it into his inside pocket and came out, the first and most difficult part of his task safely and easily accomplished, as he thought, when he heard a little cry of surprise, and saw Lettice, dressed to go out in her fur-edged cape and broad-brimmed felt hat, standing open-mouthed at the head of the stairs.

'Hullo, Lettice!' he said, with an awkward attempt to look as if he had been doing nothing unusual; 'going out?'

'Presently,' she replied. 'Allen—that was *Margot's* room!'

'Well, I know that—what of it?'

'Only—what can you want to go in there for?'

'I was passing, and I thought I'd just look in to—to see what it was like, that's all, Lettie.'

'If Margot was here, she would be angry—she'd think it was *very* inquisitive of you.'

'What the eye don't see the heart don't grieve for! Margot wouldn't mind, and, anyway, it's not your business, Miss Lettie.'

'I know that,' said Lettice; 'but all the same, Allen,' she added, in the reproving tone she had taken with him of late, 'I don't think it is at all nice of you!'

'Oh, take a walk!' he said, relapsing into street slang in his excitement.

'I am just going to take a walk,' said Lettice, with dignity. 'Not because you tell me to, though!'

Much offended, Lettice marched into the drawing-room. 'Oh, my darling!' cried her mother, really alarmed, 'have you been upstairs dressing by yourself? Did you hear anything? I'm afraid there's a strange man in the house—you ought to have waited for Roberts to come to you. I must ring for Masterman to go up at once!'

'A strange man, mummy?' said Lettice; 'why do you think there's a strange man here?'

'Why, because—oh, Lettice! I heard heavy footsteps just overhead in Margot's room—no one could have any business there at this time—no man, at all events!'

Lettice broke into a gay little laugh. 'You poor nervous mummy, *how* easily you are frightened! There's nothing to ring for Masterman about; he can't bear being disturbed at dinner; it's the only thing that ever makes him cross; he told Roberts so once. Shall

I tell you who it was in Margot's room? It was only Allen. I saw him coming out.'

'Allen!' repeated Mrs. Chadwick. 'Did you speak to him, Lettie? What did he say?'

'Oh, he only just looked in for a moment to see what it was like. Wasn't it a funny thing to do, though?'

'It was a great liberty,' said Mrs. Chadwick. 'I daresay he doesn't know any better. I'm glad it wasn't a thief, Lettie. I've such a horror of men entering the house.'

'So have I, dear, but only at night. It's so horrid of burglars to put on those hideous masks and frighten people in the dark. It wouldn't matter so much by daylight, so long as they didn't let off things.' (Lettice had a vague idea that burglars attired themselves after the fashion of a Fifth of November procession, which always caused her secret terrors.) 'Are you going upstairs?'

'Yes. If you see Allen, tell him not to go out until I have seen him.'

Now, Mrs. Chadwick had heard those steps—Allen not being particularly light-footed—for some minutes on the floor overhead; she also fancied she had made out the sound of opening and shutting drawers, and she was perfectly certain that Allen's declaration that he had only glanced in for a moment was untrue.

She went up to her daughter's room and made a careful search; the jewel-case was missing, and it was extremely improbable that Margot had taken with her

an ornament she disdained. If she could only be certain that her suspicions were correct, if only her husband could be made to see the utter depravity and worthlessness of that young man—why, they might be rid of him at last!

'I must be quite certain before I do anything,' she thought; 'it would be very dangerous to risk making a mistake.'

Then she went downstairs, asked if Allen had gone out yet, and found him in the library studying the local time-table. 'Are you going a journey?' she inquired pleasantly.

'Not far,' he said. 'I shall be back in time for dinner.'

'Where did you think of going?'

'Only to Closeborough.' He would rather not have told her, but he did not know what else to say. Margot had certainly made a singular choice of a confederate.

'To Closeborough!' Mrs. Chevening raised her eyebrows. 'Have you any business to do there?' ('He *has* the locket!' was her conclusion. 'If I could only be quite sure that bulging thing in his coat is not a cigar-case! But he has it, I'm sure, and he wants to go over to Closeborough to try to sell it. *Shall I let him?*')

But Mrs. Chadwick had a holy horror of scandal; she dreaded the publicity that might come if he drew, as he very probably would draw, any suspicion on himself by attempting to sell or pawn the trinket.

'What can call you over to Closeborough so suddenly?' she repeated.

'Nothing calls me over,' he answered; 'it's only something to do.'

'I will tell you something better to do,' she said; 'come for a drive with me. I am going to call on some people; you needn't come in if you don't wish it, but I can't have you getting into these solitary habits. If you refuse me, I shall really fancy you have some business you are ashamed of!'

What could he do but abandon all idea of disposing of the locket that day? He could slip over to-morrow; perhaps Margot was not in such a very great hurry after all—his step-mother had not been so gracious for a long time. He consented to accompany her with such alacrity as he could show.

Mrs. Chadwick left Lettice, her usual companion in Margot's absence, at home on this afternoon, and was most agreeable during the drive. She told Allen of her fears that a thief had been in the house. 'I am sure I heard drawers being opened,' she said. 'There's only one thing poor Margot has at all worth stealing; but I must make a thorough search some time this evening to see if it is missing; it was in one of the wardrobe drawers, I know!'

'Perhaps,' said Allen, looking away out of the window on his side and speaking with difficulty—'perhaps she took the locket with her to Bournemouth?'

'How clever of you to know it was the locket! What made you think of it? But you are wrong; I

am sure, quite sure now, that she never took the locket to Bournemouth. Very likely it will turn out to be in her wardrobe all the time!'

'Oh yes,' he agreed, with a suspicious eagerness, 'that's where it is, depend on it!' And Mrs. Chadwick smiled to herself—she saw that her hint had had its designed effect.

Allen's heart sank at having to undo his work, but he saw no help for it. He must replace the locket now, or Margot's difficulties, whatever they were, would be brought to light. How he cursed his own stupidity in having bungled like this—he had had his chance of earning her gratitude, and lost it after all! She would despise him, reproach him for failing her in her need. Perhaps, for want of this money, she might be in serious trouble, and he powerless! The only article of his own on which he could have raised money, his gold watch, had been stolen a few weeks ago at the Closeborough Autumn Meeting, or he would have sold that sooner than disappoint her trust.

His thoughts were very gloomy during that drive, in spite of his step-mother's small-talk and evident desire to keep him amused. While she paid short visits at two or three houses in the neighbourhood, he remained in the brougham, chafing over his forced inactivity. If he had only been a little more cautious, he might have been over at Closeborough by that time; he might have sent off the proceeds of the locket and chain, whereas now he must take the first opportunity of replacing the case before Mrs. Chadwick made that

search she had spoken of. Margot would never believe that he had even tried to help her; she would think he had been too cowardly or indifferent to make the attempt—it was very hard.

They did not return until darkness had set in. Chadwick was in his study, where his wife went at once. 'I want your advice, Joshua,' Allen heard her say as she entered, and then the door was closed.

She was consulting him about her fears, then. Allen had sense enough to be aware that he must lose no time in putting back that case where he found it. He slipped upstairs and went down the corridor, cautiously enough this time, until he reached Margot's door. To his horror, he found the door locked.

It was quite dark, he had not dared to bring a light, and it was impossible to know whether it was locked from the inside. He could feel that the key was not on his side of the lock. Could anyone be in the room? If so, who? He knocked softly, but there was no answer; he listened, but could hear nothing. He must get into that room and get rid of that case—but how? An idea came to him: the key might not be in the lock; any other key might fit it. He took one from the door of an adjoining room; it would not fit; he tried another; it went in and stuck fast—all his efforts could neither move nor extract it, and he was afraid to use his full strength for fear of breaking it.

He grew hot and desperate, insensible to everything now but the necessity of getting that key out at once.

When that was done, he would find Susan and see if she had removed the right key. If so, he could persuade her to give it to him on some pretext or other.

Was that Susan coming upstairs now with the rays of light preceding her? They shot down the corridor, and, too late to make any attempt at escape, he saw—not Susan, but his step-mother, still in her heavily furred cloak, coming towards him. He was caught!

Mrs. Chadwick had locked the door herself and removed the key; she did not acknowledge to herself in so many words that she intended in doing so to lay a trap for her misguided step-son, to cut him off from all chance of repairing his error—it was an act of prudence, nothing more; a general precaution.

But she could not help a secret elation at finding her worst suspicions thus confirmed. He could not have played more foolishly into her hands than by allowing her to find him here.

She read guilt in his white face, which showed scared and mean and ignoble, as the light fell on it from the hand-lamp she carried. But, for all her certainty that he had the stolen jewel upon him at that moment, she avoided alarming him by any premature avowal of this conviction. 'Were you trying to open that door?' she said, as if she saw nothing unusual in such an attempt; 'it is locked, and—I think your father wants to see you in the study at once.'

Too relieved that she asked no inconvenient questions, to think of disobeying this summons, he went down to the study, Mrs. Chadwick following with a

suppressed excitement. 'Did you want me, guv'nor? he began.

'I?' said Chadwick, 'no; what the devil should I want *you* for?'

'*I* sent him to you,' said his step-mother from behind, 'because I believe he can tell us something about this missing locket, if he will.'

'Hang it all!' said Chadwick irritably, 'haven't I heard enough about that for one evening? It's as likely as not she took it with her to Bournemouth. If she didn't, it serves her right for not being more careful. Why can't you wait till this evening? she'll be home then!'

'Margot? At home this evening! What are you talking about, Joshua?'

'Didn't I tell you? You didn't give me a chance—you were so full of this business. This came just as I was going out shooting. I put it in my pocket to give you—and you put it out of my head.'

He handed the pink telegraph-form to his wife, who read it aloud. 'Home at 6.45, send carriage. Margot,' she repeated. 'What does it mean? she was to have stayed till the end of the week.'

'You'd better ask her when she comes,' said Chadwick; 'she won't be long now, and it will be time enough to make a fuss about the locket when you hear what she has to say.'

Allen felt his heart grow lighter. Margot coming back—so soon! That got rid of his worst difficulties; he could give her back the locket, she could give what

explanation she chose, and no one would be any the wiser.

But Mrs. Chadwick was determined not to lose her opportunity like this. 'Joshua, you must hear me,' she said. 'I am convinced that the locket was stolen—and that Allen knows who did it.'

'Then let him say and have done with it,' said Chadwick. 'Here, you, sir, what do you know? No nonsense now.'

Allen felt that he was in a position of extreme difficulty: the one idea in his mind at that moment was a fear of saying anything which might injure Margot; he knew he was not clever, and decided that his best plan was to say as little as possible.

'I don't know anything,' he said.

'Joshua, I must tell you what makes me take this —this very painful course. I have just found him trying to unlock Margot's door with a key of his own, for I had taken away the right one. I think he ought to explain what object he had for wishing to get into her room.'

'Good God! Selina,' cried Chadwick, 'are you trying to make the boy out a thief? Why, according to you, the locket was gone already—how could he be going to steal it? What do you come to me for with such damned nonsense?'

'If you will listen to me calmly, you will hear. You ought to know that I should not bring myself to make such a terrible charge as this without some grounds. When I told you that I heard sounds in

Margot's room this afternoon, at a time when no one had any business there, I did not mention that Lettice saw Allen leaving the room shortly afterwards. I believe that he took the locket then. That when he found I had my suspicions, he grew afraid. That when I found him at the door just now, he was trying to get in and replace the locket before he was suspected. Yes, I believe, I am as sure as I can be without actually seeing it, that he has that locket somewhere about him as he stands there! If I do him any wrong in saying such things he can very easily prove it. Let him empty his pockets.'

'Do you hear, sir?' said his father; 'if this is all a mistake—and, by God! I won't believe it unless I'm forced to—it's easy to prove it.'

'I didn't steal it—and that's the truth!' said Allen. 'If you aren't satisfied with that, I can't help it. I'm not going to turn out my pockets.'

'You'll not put me off like that,' said his father; 'you make me believe there's something at the bottom of this. It's no time for standing on any rubbishy dignity, I tell you: either show your step-mother that she's gone out of her way to suspect you, or, by heaven! I'll have you searched by main force. I will have this cleared up before we're very much older. Come, don't be an obstinate young fool—haven't I said I don't suspect you? But it's gone too far to stop here!'

Searched—and Margot's letter still undestroyed! She would come home to find her secret, whatever it was, disclosed; she would think he had betrayed her at

the first alarm; she would despise him more than ever, as a coward and traitor as well as a fool! He dreaded the contempt he knew he would read in those proud hazel eyes, the curt but stinging comments she would make on the way in which he had fulfilled his trust. And then, suddenly, he saw a means of retrieving himself in her eyes—yes, he would show her that he—even he—could act like the truest gentleman, could bear to be accused of theft sooner than save himself at her expense! Had she not said herself that a gentleman would scorn to save himself thus? Would she not be grateful to him, even admire him perhaps a little, when she learnt what he had borne for her? And was not that worth bearing a little temporary disgrace for? For, of course, it would all be cleared up when she came back. So he drew the case from his pocket and laid it on the study table. 'You needn't search me,' he said, with an excitement that gave him an air of brazen defiance; 'if you must have it, there it is!'

The most unlikely persons have their imaginative fits, in which they conceive themselves as they never were or will be, playing to admiration parts for which nature has hopelessly disqualified them, in which the mind avenges itself on the body by calmly ignoring its existence. But Allen—perhaps because his imagination was limited—had never been able to picture himself as compelling Margot's admiration and remorseful gratitude by any deed of romantic heroism, so that, now the opportunity had come and he had actually been worthy of it, he felt that he had been enabled to

bear himself in this utterly unhoped-for manner by some happy accident.

It may be said that it was a wrong-headed piece of heroism, after all—if there is any heroism at all in self-sacrifice with the certainty of a speedy reprieve; and, no doubt, a cooler and clearer head than Allen's would have seen some way of preserving Margot's secret without incriminating himself.

But he saw none; and, at least, there was nothing insincere or calculating about his action, which was simply an attempt to follow a code of honour which Margot herself had been the first to reveal to him.

Whatever may be thought of the act itself, whether it be held Quixotism or self-interest in disguise, the fact remains that it represented a height far above Allen's ordinary standard of action—a height to which nothing but the force of his feelings towards Margot could have impelled him. No wonder if he glanced back with a disproportionate sense of triumph.

Low as his opinion of Allen had been of late, Chadwick had not really believed him capable of dishonesty until the case was actually produced. But with such ocular proof as that, all further doubt was impossible; the gradual undermining of his confidence and affection had made it easier now to accept the fact of his son's guilt. He drew in his breath with a sharp hissing sound, expressive of disgust and pain too, before he could trust himself to speak. 'Your low company and your fool's extravagance have brought you to this!' he said at last, with a low choked utterance. 'A thief!

My God, that my only son should turn out such a hopeless blackguard as this!'

Allen stood there in dogged silence; he was not even hurt that his father should accept his guilt so readily; he was rather glad than otherwise—it simplified matters. As to hard words, he was willing to bear much more than that in Margot's service.

Mrs. Chadwick felt delivered from a great anxiety by Allen's surrender; her one dread throughout had been that, by some means unknown to her, he had already contrived to disembarrass himself of the case. She felt almost grateful to him, so that she interposed between him and any further torrent of bitter reproaches with which his father might have overwhelmed him.

'Let him go now,' she said, 'you are not calm enough just yet to speak to him. Allen, you had better leave us.'

There was a silence after he had gone, during which Chadwick sat, frowning darkly, with his eyes fixed moodily on the ground, while Mrs. Chadwick stood, one hand resting upon the study mantel-board.

At last she began: 'I really can't tell you how grieved and shocked I am about this unhappy business, Joshua.'

He caught the insincere ring which not all her tact could quite disguise.

'Can't you?' he said sardonically; 'in that case it's waste of time to try.'

She took no notice of this little brutality. 'I want

to know what you think of doing,' she persisted coldly; 'it can't end here.'

'I suppose you want to have the boy charged at quarter sessions—that would satisfy you, eh?' he said, with an irritated twist in his chair.

'You have no right to say such things. On the contrary, I am most anxious that this should be kept a secret. No one knows of it except our two selves, and no one must know—we cannot have any scandal.'

'Do you think I am so proud of having a son a thief that I shall go about telling the whole county? But there's one person who'll have to be told, and that's your fine Miss Margot—she's the principal party concerned, and she ought to be consulted.'

'Joshua, why distress her? You will not have her told?'

'How do I know whether she isn't mixed up in this, somehow?' said Chadwick, purely to annoy his wife and without any real suspicion of the kind.

'Margot! Mixed up in this?' cried her mother, turning pale. 'How could she be? But if you insist on her knowing, I will tell her myself. Listen! surely that is the carriage, they are here already. . . . Not a word of this till after dinner, remember, Joshua!'

Allen, up in his bed-room, heard the wheels too: Margot was here, she would be told the disgrace he was in, and the cause of it—and then, ah! how different their next meeting would be from any that had gone before! Her eyes would be soft and kindly for him when she knew all he had gone through. He was sure

that she would be as frank and outspoken in her praise as in her blame. So he beguiled the time by trying to picture to himself how she would look when he saw her next; what she would say and do. Poor fellow! luckily for him he was no prophet.

## CHAPTER II

### AMATEUR HEROISM

Le silence est le parti le plus sûr pour celui qui se défie de soimême.—*La Rochefoucauld.*

MRS. CHADWICK only reached the hall in time to see the trunks being carried in under Masterman's supervision, and Ida, half supported by Margot, slowly mounting the staircase. She hurried after them and overtook them before they had reached the broad gallery at the top. 'Didn't they tell you I was downstairs?' she cried, as she embraced them effusively. 'I was *so* surprised to get your telegram, Margot! Ida, my pet, you are not looking as if Bournemouth had agreed with you—and where is Miss Henderson?'

At the mention of this name Ida, who had passively submitted to her mother's caresses, broke away suddenly, and presently they heard her door locked.

'Ida is not at all herself,' said Margot, answering her mother's mute question. 'She has had a great shock. Camilla has behaved very badly. It's too long a story to tell on the stairs, but we found a note this morning to say that she had run away to be married to Mr. Melladew. Poor Ida was so devoted to her that she felt it dreadfully—she had been kept quite in the

dark, it seems. And altogether, mother, I was so uneasy about her that I thought it safer to come home at once.'

'You were quite right,' said Mrs. Chadwick, 'she is better at home. That double-faced girl! And to Mr. Melladew, too! They scarcely spoke while they were here, as far as I could see.' (Mrs. Chadwick had evidently not troubled herself to observe them very closely.) 'However, dear, I am not at all sorry she has dismissed herself—I have been making up my mind to tell her she must go, for a long while; nothing but Ida's health—— She will feel this for a little while, no doubt, but it is better so. And now, Margot, come into my room, I have something most important to tell you.'

'Not now!' pleaded Margot, 'let me go to Ida first. I am sure she ought not to be left alone.'

She went to Ida's door and knocked gently; it was some time before she could get any answer, but at last a hard dreary voice came from inside: 'Go away, please, I don't want anything—I'm tired.'

Margot eventually got her to unlock the door. Ida was still dressed; she seemed in a state of half stupor, a dumb misery beyond tears. Margot was afraid to leave her alone, and at length induced her to come to her own room, which had by this time been unlocked and put in readiness by Mrs. Chadwick's orders.

Then, still in her travelling dress, she came back to her mother's room. 'Ida is asleep now,' she said. 'I have given her my bed, and I can sleep on the sofa tonight. If she is not better in the morning we must

send for Dr. Seaton. She seems quite broken-hearted at Camilla's conduct.'

'Ida will get over that, poor child. And I want to tell you what has happened only this afternoon. Margot, only fancy! that dreadful Allen very nearly succeeded in stealing the locket and chain your step-father gave you. Fortunately I was able to catch him almost in the act.'

'Stealing!' said Margot slowly, and then she pressed her palms against her eyes, after a habit of hers when she was trying to grasp a new idea. Presently she withdrew her hands, and her eyes contradicted the assumed indifference with which she asked, 'Have you told anyone yet?'

'I told his father in Allen's presence what I suspected—he made him turn out all his pockets. By a really quite providential chance, the case was in one of them.'

'Ah,' said Margot, with a little dry intonation, which made Mrs. Chadwick add rather hastily: 'I mean—he might so easily have thrown it *away*, you know!'

'Did he say what he wanted it for?' asked Margot.

'He could not want it for any honest purpose,' said her mother; 'he has been getting into debt or something disgraceful, I have no doubt. But whatever his object was, there could not be a clearer case of theft—and to rob you, of all persons, and of your only valuable trinket!'

'I don't want to pose as a victim,' said Margot. 'I detested the thing. I would gladly have got rid of it. Mother,' she added suddenly, with a shade on her white forehead as if she felt a certain shame in asking the question, 'will—anything be done? Will this be passed over, like the rest?'

'That, my dear, will depend to a great extent on you. Your step-father wishes to speak to you about it this evening after dinner.'

Margot shrank back with revolt expressed in all her pliant form. 'To speak to me! Why—what have I to do with it? Oh no, mother, I don't want to hear about it. Let it be settled without me!'

'My dear, don't be foolish, and listen to me. I think —I only say I think—that, with a little management, Allen may really be got rid of this time. What I am so afraid of is, that you may be tempted out of good-nature to make some excuses for him which might turn the scale. You *will* be firm? You know what an infliction he is to us all—we may never have such an opportunity as this again! You won't say anything to lose it?'

Margot laughed, a bitter little laugh at her own expense. 'Am I so good-natured?' she said. 'You need not fear, mother. If he has any excuse, let him make it himself. *I* shall not. He must bear the consequences of his folly!'

There was a petulant energy in her manner, a settled determination to evade all responsibility, to wash her hands, if possible, of a matter in which she found it in-

tolerable to be even slightly concerned, that reassured her mother.

Allen presented himself below at the usual hour for dinner. He thought to come down to find his character triumphantly cleared, to receive his father's grudging amends, and read in Margot's face that she appreciated his loyalty.

Nothing could have been further from his actual experiences; Margot did not appear at all, leaving it to her mother to make her excuses, and although his father did not address a word to him throughout the meal, there was that in his manner which showed that he considered Allen's presence there as an additional outrage. Chadwick said little to his wife, drank rather more wine than usual, and glowered at his son from under his eyebrows. Mrs. Chadwick kept up as much of a conversation as was possible when the only events of interest had to be ignored before the servants. But after Allen had got over the disappointment of Margot's absence, he did not mind much else; he did not find the dinner duller or more oppressive than usual, even; his thoughts were all dwelling on the meeting that was soon to be, for his step-mother had mentioned that Margot would come down later. That she would speak, even at some cost to herself, it never occurred him to doubt; he did not believe that there could be anything really wrong in her secret, and he had an implicit faith that she would not allow him to suffer this undeserved disgrace a moment longer than she could help.

'You will find Margot and me in the drawing-room,

Joshua,' said Mrs. Chadwick at dessert, 'as soon as you have finished your wine.'

'I'll come now,' he said. 'I've no particular desire to sit over my wine in his company. As for you,' he added to Allen, 'you will stay here, or wherever else you like, till you are sent for.'

Allen sat at the table alone for some time; he knew that a conclave was being held in the drawing-room, but he had no uneasiness. Margot was there, hearing what he had undergone sooner than betray his trust, telling them how they had misunderstood him.

The council lasted a long time: the drawing-room was at the end of a corridor, and he could hear nothing. Becoming impatient, he rose and went to the fireplace, gazing out into the black depths through the big curved window, where the table, with its yellow-shaded lamps, white napery and gleaming plate, was oddly reflected above the blades of hoary grass and section of frosty path in the foreground. He alternated restlessly between window and fireplace, unable to control his excitement. At last the summons came in a matter-of-fact form enough. Masterman appeared and said, 'I was to say, Mr. Allen, that coffee is served in the drawing-room.'

Allen started up eagerly—the moment of reward, of triumph, was at hand! His heart was beating violently as he went down the corridor and opened the door that led into the lesser drawing-room; there was a slight resistance as he grasped the handle, and he found himself face to face with Margot. She had apparently expected

him to enter by the other door, and was about to escape, for she gave a slight start as she saw him.

'Margot!' he cried, and then the light faded out of his plain face—the words died on his lips.

She drew away from him; she did not offer to take his outstretched hand, only looked at him for one unwilling instant—and then averted her face. What was it he read in her clear eyes? Not admiration, not gratitude. Was it compassion struggling with an invincible repugnance, or—keenest stab of all—was it dread?

'You are wanted—there,' she said, with a little shiver as she indicated the further room, where his father and step-mother could be seen through the arch.

'Don't you go, Margot,' called Chadwick. 'I want you to hear this.'

She turned back reluctantly and took up her position behind her mother's chair, where she could be partly in shadow.

Allen could not take his eyes from her. She wore black that evening; one or two white Japanese chrysanthemums were trembling at her breast, her fair neck and arms gleamed through the lace of her dress, her eyebrows were drawn and her proud mouth set, as if she were nerving herself to go through a painful scene. She kept her eyes down and did not look at him again.

'Now,' said Chadwick sternly, 'for the last time, have you got anything to say for yourself? Not that there's any excuse for you, that I can see!'

She had not told! She had left him to bear the

full brunt. For a moment his head whirled, he felt a mad revolt against such weakness, such cruelty, till he looked at her. How pale she was! How disdainfully defiant the pose of her head and the slight smile—more a contraction than a smile—on her red lips.

He saw it all; whatever her secret was, she had not found courage to tell it herself—she waited for him to speak, and evidently, though she was too proud to appeal to him even by a glance, she expected him to save himself—she had no confidence in his discretion!

In his first rush of indignation he might have spoken; but the thought that she *expected* him to do so, that she despised him in advance, galled him, put him on his mettle. He would force her to recognise that he was not such a cur as she chose to assume. The treachery should be hers, not his; she should see that she need fear nothing from him.

'I've no excuse to make,' he said huskily. 'I took the locket—there's no use in saying anything more now.'

She raised her eyes for the first time: the flowers on her breast rose and fell rapidly; he could only see her face indistinctly in the tinted gloom above the heavy lamp-shade, but it seemed to him that he caught a momentary look of wonder, of shamed and startled gratitude. If he had known the true history of the letter on which he had acted, and the motive which had impelled it, he would not have misread her face thus, and no chivalrous ideal, no half-digested notions of honour would have kept him silent. But he knew

nothing—he saw only what his limited insight led him to expect that she must necessarily feel, and little suspected how far she was from either surprise or gratitude just then.

'Well,' said his father, in a halting and somewhat dispirited tone, and seeming to address himself to the fire-screen, for he did not look at Allen, 'I've warned you before that my patience wouldn't last for ever—though God knows I didn't expect anything as bad as this! Now, you've gone too far. I've made up my mind what to do, and when I once do that, I don't change it again in a hurry, and—and the long and short of it is—' he seemed to find a difficulty in announcing his purpose,—'that I can't keep you in this house any longer.'

Allen heard without understanding at first. He ought to have been prepared for this; it was true he had been warned, and yet it had never entered into his thoughts till that moment that his sacrifice would have such a terrible consequence as this. It could not be —Margot would never permit it!—why did she not speak?

'Father!' he cried hoarsely, 'you—you won't do that . . . not turn me out? Where am I to go?'

'I have settled all that,' said Chadwick. 'I'm not going to treat you as my father did me, though you deserve it much more than I did. I shall send you where you'll have every chance of turning over a new leaf, if you like to make use of it. You will go out to Bengal.'

'To Bengal! India!' stammered Allen; 'what can I do there?'

'You'll be kept out of mischief, at all events. You'll have opportunities of working at the factory; and indigo-planting is better for you than hanging about here and going to the devil as fast as you can.'

The wretched boy turned to Margot in his despair. 'Margot!' he cried, in passionate appeal, 'you hear? You won't let them send me away? Oh, tell them . . . speak for me . . . you *know* I—I don't deserve this!'

'Allen,' said Margot, in a low, agitated voice, 'it—it is not fair to appeal to me. I can say nothing for you that you cannot say for yourself. Mother, let me go,' she pleaded, bending over Mrs. Chadwick's chair, 'I cannot bear this—I cannot be wanted here now!'

'She may go, Joshua?' said her mother interrogatively; 'she has had a trying day—it is cruel to keep her here any longer.'

'Let her go if she wants to,' was the reply. 'Stay, she'd better take this with her.' He took the morocco case out of his pocket and held it towards her. Margot took it with reluctant fingers. As she passed Allen on her way to the door, she gave him one look; there was compassion in her eyes, but anxiety in her quivering lips—something shrinking, deprecating, even, in her whole bearing. She seemed half-inclined to speak, to give him her hand at parting, and then, with her proud neck bent, she turned away and left him without a sign.

She was proud to the last, then? She knew that it

was in his power to denounce her, and yet she would not stoop to supplicate even now—she had gone away because she would not stay to hear herself accused. The thought that she still expected him to betray her stung him the more because, in his first revolt against Fate, it had crossed his mind that he might surely be justified in speaking now. But that look of Margot's had for the second time produced a revulsion. She had no confidence in him, she believed that he would give way under this last strain, and proclaim his innocence and her disgrace. Well, he would not: he had begun, and he would go through with it to the end. Perhaps, even yet, when she knew that she had been mistaken in him, she would relent before his sentence was carried out. But, whether she did or not, even separation from her was better than living under the burden of her contempt. As things were, she was deeply indebted to him; proud as she was, she could not help knowing that, in her secret heart. For once he could feel that the balance of superiority between them had changed sides.

And then a dogged resentment against his father came in to sustain and strengthen his resolution. He chose to believe him guilty, to drive him from home like a criminal;—very well, then—Allen was not going to undeceive him; home had been no home to him, except for Margot's presence, for a long time—it would not break his heart to leave it.

All these considerations were present in a confused fashion to his mind in the few seconds that elapsed

between Margot's departure and her mother's next words.

'Allen,' said Mrs. Chadwick, 'you see how your conduct distresses your step-sister. I must beg, I must really insist, that you make no more appeals of that kind to her; she has much to bear just now, and if this is to continue, I must forbid you to speak to her at all —it is so unmanly!'

'Come, Selina,' said Chadwick gruffly, 'the boy 's going—let that be enough for you, without nagging at him!'

'You have the art of choosing the most offensive expressions, Joshua,' retorted his wife, colouring angrily. 'I do not belong to the class of persons who nag, I hope! And I wish Allen to understand this—though perhaps you will find a term for that, too—for his own sake and for ours, he must keep an absolute silence about the reasons which have led to his going away. We shall, of course, do the same. I cannot have my daughter's name mixed up with a vulgar story of theft. No one at present knows of this. All it is necessary to say is, that he is going out to learn to be a planter, and that this has been decided upon for some time—there is every reason why more should not be said. Allen, you understand that?'

'Your step-mother is right,' said his father; 'it's lucky we can hush this up. So you'll hear no more about it from us, and, of course, you'll hold your own tongue—that's all you can do now.'

'Yes,' said Allen, 'I'll hold my tongue. And—when am I to go, father?'

'As soon as I can manage it,' said Chadwick. 'In about a fortnight, I expect. I shall write to my agent to-night, and tell him to come down to Bombay and meet you. I can take you up to town next week, and get you all the outfit that's necessary. Macdonald can see after the rest. That's all I've got to say to you to-night. You'd better be off to bed, and think yourself lucky you've been spared from bringing open disgrace on your head!'

Allen stood there for a moment, wondering whether his father would offer his hand, or say good-night at parting; he did neither, and so the son went out, and carried an aching heart and a confused head to bed with him.

So far from being benefited by her stay at Bournemouth, Ida had come back worse by many degrees than when she started. For days she lay in a listless semi-lethargic state, repulsing all attentions with an unnatural hardness, praying only to be left alone with her misery. Dr. Seaton, who was called in, asked whether she had received any sudden shock—if she had anything on her mind; and being informed that a governess to whom she was much attached had left her suddenly, asked no further questions, like the discreet family practitioner he was, but remarked blandly that no doubt that would account for the symptoms; prescribed perfect quiet and rest for the present, and a complete change of scene and surroundings as soon as she was able to bear it. Privately he had his doubts whether the departure of Miss Henderson would account entirely for his

patient's utter prostration—doubts which, as the reader knows, were not without foundation.

By what an elaborate tissue of deceit Miss Henderson had encouraged the poor girl in her absurd delusion, Ida and she could alone have told. It was not, of course, mere gratuitous cruelty on her part. Miss Henderson had set her mind on marrying Melladew, who, owing to the death of his father, was now his own master. He was willing to marry at that moment, provided he was not obliged to make any extraordinary efforts; but she knew that if she lost her opportunity now it might never recur. She had induced him to propose a marriage at Bournemouth, but, Melladew's movements being necessarily uncertain just then, she had of course to reside herself in the Registrar's district for the full period required by law. Her utmost ingenuity was taxed to induce Ida to be patient, and to account for Melladew's failure to appear, as she had been led to expect he would do. He jeopardised her scheme by paying a flying visit to Bournemouth in the second week of their stay, for he met her with Ida accidentally and behaved with such marked coolness that Ida declined for some time to be comforted. Then the governess offered to see the young man herself, and ascertain his true feelings, and came back with an explanation which Ida found satisfactory and even encouraging. Margot's arrival was welcomed by neither party, and certainly rendered Miss Henderson's part additionally complicated. But her talent for intrigue, and the ascendency she had over Ida, carried her through.

Ida was still anxiously counting upon the result of an interview the governess was to arrange for her, when the blow fell. A few hasty lines from her beloved Camilla announced that she had been married that morning before the Registrar to Melladew, for whom it should be said here, that he had no suspicion of the deception that had been practised upon Ida.

The disillusion, when it came, was cruel and crushing. School-girl as she was, the passion that had filled her inexperienced heart was deep and real enough, and it had been artfully fostered and heightened. It was all morbid and unhealthy and forced, no doubt, but that only made it the more humiliating, more impossible to confide to any other ear. She writhed helplessly at the thought of how she had been duped, how they were both perhaps laughing at her infatuation.

Her belief in human nature, her interest in life, were shattered; she lay in blank misery, with only one desire left—to defend the secret of her sick heart to the last.

She might perhaps have made a confidante of Margot, who was the only person whose presence she at all tolerated, but there were reasons which prevented her. Margot and she had been less intimate of late, and she knew, too, that her sister had never had a high opinion of Melladew. Bitterly as he had deceived her, Ida could not endure to hear him slightingly spoken of, and so she brooded and suffered in silence.

Her delicate system soon showed signs of being

physically affected ; for days she was really ill, and, from weakness and exhaustion, more or less unconscious. Margot was her constant attendant during the period, hardly leaving the sick room. In any case her deep attachment to her sister would have made her undertake these duties cheerfully ; now, she welcomed them for an additional reason. They made it easier for her to avoid Allen.

She had to meet him occasionally, though she had contrived hitherto that others should be present ; but his face haunted her with its sombre dejection even in the sick room. She felt pursued by a reproachful appeal which irritated, exasperated her, even. She was afraid of herself, afraid of undoing her own deliverance in some moment of sentimental weakness. It was so clearly good for them all—for him especially—that he should go. Why should he take his banishment to heart so absurdly ? Why should he not understand that she *could* not plead for him ?

And Miss Chevening did her best to stifle her conscience and harden her heart, succeeding so far as to look forward with a growing impatience to the day when Allen would depart.

'I think you are better to-day, darling,' she said one day to Ida ; 'you will be able to come downstairs very soon, and you need not be afraid of being annoyed by Allen—he is going away.'

'Is he ?' said Ida languidly. 'Why should I be afraid of being annoyed, Margot ?'

'Why, dear,' said Margot, with a secret disappoint-

ment that Ida showed so little satisfaction, 'you know you told me that he made you miserable!'

'Did I?' she said wearily. 'It all seems so long ago. I forget. Why is he going?'

'Because,' said Margot, who could not trust Ida with the true story, 'his father thought it was better for him to be learning indigo planting out in India than doing nothing here.'

Ida was silent for a few moments, taking in this with the slow intelligence of a convalescent. At length she said: 'He is not being sent away, I suppose, Margot—not to punish him for anything?'

'Of course not!' said Miss Chevening hastily. She was glad that she was in a position where her face was not to be easily scrutinised.

'I am glad of that,' said Ida softly—and in Margot's ears the words sounded like a reproach.

## CHAPTER III

### AN UNWILLING ARBITRESS

*Gaunt.* Call it a travel that thou tak'st for pleasure.
*Bol.* My heart will sigh when I miscall it so,
Which finds it an enforced pilgrimage.—*Rich. II.*

And I know
That all these pains are trials of my faith,
And that thyself, when thou hast seen me strain'd
And sifted to the utmost, wilt at length
Yield me thy love and know me for thy knight.
*Pelleas and Ettarre.*

When Gorsecombe learnt, as Mrs. Chadwick lost no time in enabling it to do, that Allen was to go out to India almost immediately, it did not excite itself greatly over the intelligence. He was the least seen and (not an invariable consequence) the least interesting person in the Chadwick *ménage*—a common-looking young man vaguely understood to be disreputable in a commonplace fashion.

Still Gorsecombe did discuss the matter, as it discussed every piece of local news, from a suicide to an outbreak of swine-fever. The cleverest Miss Eddlestone said a thing about it which went the round of village drawing-rooms, and was thought a little too satirical

at the Dorcas meeting. Some one had observed to her that it seemed a little hard to send that young man out all alone to a distant plantation. 'Very hard!' she had agreed—'on the plantation.' But then Allen had sniggered once at the most effective part of her recitation of 'The Legend of the Monk Felix,' which naturally gave her a low opinion of his moral and intellectual nature.

Mrs. Chadwick went about planting her item of news in the best centres of distribution, with embellishments supplied by her own tact and ingenuity. 'My husband found it was absolutely necessary to send somebody he could trust out to those factories of his at once. So he thought it would be such a good thing for my step-son: it would steady him, teach him responsibility; for of course I need not tell *you*, my dear, he has given us a great deal of anxiety at times. And really, now he has got used to the idea, I think he quite looks forward to it—the novelty and activity and all that; such a much healthier life for a boy of his tendencies!'

*Had* Allen got used to the idea? In a manner, perhaps, he had. There had been one terrible night of revolt, but that wore out into a stunned acquiescence in his lot. And soon he began to find alleviations even in his misery. We have said already that he had a vein of sentimental self-consciousness in him which led him to take a morbid pleasure in being harshly treated, if only for the sake of the compassion he believed that he excited in Margot.

But he knew then that her compassion was mingled largely with contempt, and he knew too that he had more or less deserved it. Now the case was altered: the one person whose opinion he valued had the best of reasons for secretly being grateful to him, secretly admiring him even, however little she chose to show it. Conceive the fascination to a nature like this, full of vague romance for which he had no vocabulary, in the relations between Margot and himself during the days which followed his decree of banishment.

Living in the same house, meeting her from time to time, though only for a moment and in the presence of others, he studied her face on those occasions and read there the pity he thirsted for restrained by a shrinking dread that he might yet fail her. No thought of despising her for her weakness came into his mind; it seemed quite natural that she should consent to be spared disgrace; he could not imagine her exposed and openly humiliated. His love, devotion, and reverence seemed rather to have been increased than lessened by her silent acceptance of the sacrifice. That she appreciated it he was sure; there was something subdued and softened in her manner to him that made her seem more beautiful and dear than ever. And yet, as the days went on, and still she gave no sign, he began, poor fellow, to wish for some avowal—ever so slight a one—of her indebtedness; she could not mean to let him go without a word! He knew that Ida's illness made great demands upon her time, but surely she could find an opportunity if she would. He longed to let her

know that she was safe, that he would rather be banished from her than lose the privilege of her regard; he pictured himself pouring out all manner of highflown and chivalrous speeches to her as she listened sweetly remorseful. But she gave him no chance. She contrived always to avoid encountering him alone, and in time he found ground for a mad hope even in this. She did not mean to permit him to carry out this sacrifice; she was only trying his endurance—she would declare his innocence at the right moment! And meanwhile he had the excitement before him of that ever-possible interview, which almost kept him from noting how the time was slipping by.

He was in the library one afternoon, trying, by his father's desire, to master a treatise on indigo-cultivation, when the door opened cautiously. His heart stopped beating for a moment—he thought Margot had conquered her pride and had come to him. It was a crushing disappointment to see that his visitor was Susan. Susan closed the door softly behind her and stood there, her pretty, high-coloured face flushed, her hands in the pockets of her coquettish apron like a stage-soubrette. 'There's no one about,' she said, 'except Miss Lettice, and she's running about the garden. So I've come in to have a talk with you. It isn't true that you're going right away to India, is it? Masterman was saying it was all settled.'

'It's true enough,' said Allen ruefully; 'in a very short time, too.'

'What do you let yourself be sent there for?'

'How can I help it?—the governor's arranged it all.'

'I know better. Miss Margot's at the bottom of this, I'll go bail!'

Allen started. 'What do you know—she hasn't told you?'

'There's some things as need no telling,' said Susan enigmatically; 'but do you mean to put up with it—to let that proud, stuck-up minx get you turned out of house and home? You can't be such a fool!'

'I'd sooner bear anything than say what might get her into trouble.'

'Get her into trouble!' repeated Susan, her eyes sparkling. 'Well, to be sure,' she added diplomatically, 'there's that to be thought of. She's afraid you'll tell on something she's been up to, and that's why she's so anxious to get rid of you. But you won't go, not if I can prevent it.'

Allen began to be afraid he had said too much. 'Look here, Susan,' he said, 'if I choose to say nothing it's my affair. If—if she wishes me to go I shall go, and there's an end of it; you've no business to interfere that I can see.'

'And that's the way I'm treated!' cried the girl, coming nearer, 'after all you've said to me!'

Allen stared at her in blank dismay. 'I! What have I said?'

'What have you said! Haven't you told me times out of number that if it wasn't for me you wouldn't live here any longer? Haven't you asked me if I

thought there was any hope for you some day? Haven't I as good as told you that if you liked to speak plain I was ready to marry you?'

He fell back in a bewilderment that was almost ludicrous. 'I don't know what you mean,' he said.

Susan advanced to the table, and, resting her hands upon it, bent forward to him. 'Then I'll speak plainer,' she said breathlessly, 'the time's gone by for picking words. You ain't fit to take care of yourself: you want some one that will look after you and see you're not put upon. I'm a match for Miss Margot, I am, if I'm given the chance. Marry me on the quiet—it's easy to get a special licence or something if you know how to manage it. I've put by enough if you can't get the money. You might do worse than marry me, if I *am* only a servant. And I'll see they don't ship you off out of the way then.'

'You don't understand,' said Allen; 'you've always been kind and that, Susan, but I never had a notion of thinking of you in that way. And as to what you say about my telling you I wouldn't stop here but for one person and all the rest of it—why, I remember saying that now, but it wasn't you I meant, it was her.'

'Her!' demanded Susan, her face visibly falling, 'what her?'

'Why, Margot; there never was anyone else for me since I first saw her.'

Susan had played a desperate stroke. She did not, as has been said, care in the least for Allen, whom she thoroughly despised; but she had believed that he was

quite capable of being induced to marry her if she thought fit to give him encouragement. She felt certain, in her ignorant ambition, that she could make a good use of her position as her master's daughter-in-law whenever she chose to do so. She knew now that she had blundered egregiously, and she laid all the blame on her young mistress. This was the second heavy grudge she owed her, not to speak of countless minor slights which Margot, by her careless unconcern, had given her maid cause to magnify or imagine.

For the moment, however, all her spite, all the malignity born of a useless humiliation (for Susan had her pride, and it had cost her something to say what she had said), vented itself upon Allen.

'In love with her—with Miss Margot!' she cried. 'Well, I didn't think you was so mean-spirited as that! Don't imagine I'm jealous: I shouldn't stoop to it. I only spoke as I did just now by way of joking like, to see if you'd believe I meant it. But you to go and fall in love with Miss Margot! What next, I wonder? Can't you see as she hates the very ground you walk on? It's common talk below-stairs that she can't bring herself to speak you civil; she won't so much as look your way if she can help it. And you fancying she'll come round! Why, she'll be fit to jump for joy the day you go out of the house—like everyone else, for that matter. You're nothing but a disgrace to the family; there's none of us that has a good word to say for you, upstairs or below. As for me, if I could prevent you going by lifting up my little finger, I

wouldn't, so don't you think it. I've too much contempt for you!'

He sat there breathless under this unexpected tirade, which Susan, perhaps for fear of an anti-climax, brought to an end by an abrupt exit. He did not take up the manual again—he had no heart for indigo just then. Susan's spiteful candour had gone home. Would everyone be glad when he was gone? Did Margot detest him? No, he could not believe that; she *must* feel kindly towards him after what he had done for her, even if she dared not show it. And yet—what if Susan had spoken the truth? He could not stay in the library just then, and, as if it would be easier in the open air to dismiss the memory of her hateful words, he went out into the grounds and down to a small stone alcove at the end of one of the walks, where he sat down. Everything looked cheerless: the dull coppery sun sinking into a bank of grey haze behind the bare trees, the paths strewn with rime-edged leaves, the pinched shrubs and the misty distances, all combined to increase his depression; he felt as if he were already an exile.

Suddenly there was a soft patter of feet, a vigorous panting beside him, and then a great head was thrust under his arm, and Yarrow's honest golden eyes were looking up at him in wistful sympathy. Allen broke down at this, as the collie laid a paw on his knee with a flourish and began to make an ineffectual attempt to lick his face with a generous tongue. He threw his arm round the dog's neck and bent over his smooth

head. '*You* won't be glad when I'm gone, will you, old fellow?' he said aloud.

When he raised his blurred eyes he saw Lettice on the path before him with her hoop in her hand.

'Yarrow always finds you out,' she said; 'he won't stay with me if he thinks you're near.'

'Yes,' said Allen, 'we've always been friends; *he's* never turned against me.'

Lettice flushed. '*I* shouldn't have turned; if—if you had been nicer. I kept friends as long as ever I could.'

'Well, you'll be rid of me very soon now, Lettie. I shan't trouble you much when I'm in India.'

'Don't you want to go to India?'

'I hate it,' he said; 'but I've got to go.'

'Are you going as a punishment—was it for going into Margot's room that day?—did you break any of her things? You weren't to go to India before that, I know. And, oh, Allen, it was I who told mother—but only because she thought it was a robber.'

'It's all right, Lettice,' he said—he was anxious to prevent her from arriving at the truth, for his own sake as well as Margot's. 'That had nothing to do with it. I'm not going to India for anything I've done wrong—only, well, to be kept out of mischief.'

'Don't they have any mischief in India? It must be rather a horrid place,' said Lettice.

'You aren't sorry I'm going, are you?' he said.

'I wasn't at first,' Lettice confessed. 'I began to be a little sorry just now when I saw you minded it so.'

'I want you to be a little sorry, Lettice, now and then. I—I dare say I don't deserve you should; but never mind that, I'd like you to be sorry all the same. And tell me, Lettice, do you think—is Margot sorry at all!'

'Well, you see,' said Lettice, who was considerate as well as conscientious, 'Margot has such a lot to think about just now, with poor Ida so ill. I don't think she has much time to be sorry about anything else.'

'But you don't think she's glad?' he persisted; 'say you don't believe that, Lettice.'

'Glad!' said Lettice; 'oh, no, Allen, she wouldn't be so unkind as that. You mustn't think such things. And, if you like,' she added, with a little hesitation, 'you can come down with me and see if the stream's frozen over yet. There was a little very thin ice early this morning.'

Allen accepted the olive-branch she tendered; it comforted him a little to think that he was not quite friendless, and so he spent the brief remainder of the afternoon with Lettice, who was soon chattering away on things in general, and they came back to the house together as if the long-standing coolness between them had never existed. 'You aren't going away just yet, are you?' she said as she was going upstairs to take off her hat and cloak; 'we can have a walk every day till you go.'

And in the evening after tea she came and sat on the ottoman in the drawing-room, and nestled up beside him in a manner intended to show that he had

quite regained her favour. 'Lettie, darling,' her mother said, with a little displeased movement of her eyebrows, 'surely there are other seats, without inconveniencing Allen!'

'I'm not inconveniencing him, mother,' said Lettice calmly; 'he likes me here.'

And indeed the confiding pressure of the dainty little figure against his shoulder, the mute caress with which she rubbed her cheek on his sleeve, sent a thrill to the heart of the poor Pariah, so long accustomed to disfavour and neglect.

He sat there in the firelight, not venturing to speak, for fear of saying, as he generally did, something which would draw down on him some scathing remark from his step-mother. Now and then he cast a grateful glance down on Lettice's half-shut eyes and tumbled chestnut locks.

Lettice little knew, in obeying the generous instinct that drew her to make a demonstration so unusual to her, what a work of mercy she was performing, or how the memory of that bright head against his shoulder would be with him through many a dark hour in time to come.

As usual, he saw nothing of Margot until dinner, and then she carefully avoided addressing him directly, or even, he fancied, meeting his eyes. There is no form of uneasiness more subtle and unsubstantial than such an impression in almost any case. Here it made these encounters one long torment to him; yet he found a fascination in them he could not resist.

That evening his heart was lighter. Might not his future be about to improve? Lettice had unexpectedly capitulated that day: who could say that Margot herself would not surrender? And his father had said nothing more about India lately. Could he have abandoned that idea? Anything seemed possible that night.

However, he was rudely undeceived. After Mrs. Chadwick and Margot had left the room, Chadwick sat drinking his wine in gloomy silence, and once or twice he seemed about to speak, and filled his glass again instead.

At last, with his eyes fixed on the fire, he said, 'I suppose you know you are to leave this on Monday?'

On Monday—and this was Wednesday! Only four days in which to see Margot—four days in which to enjoy Lettice's regained favour! He sat speechless, paralysed by the shock.

'I did think,' continued Chadwick in the same constrained tone, 'of leaving it till after Christmas; but there's no use in delay that I can see, and I wrote to Macdonald last week and fixed the time. 'You'll go out by the "Chusan," which sails on Monday week, and you'll want a full week in town to get your outfit. I shall go up with you myself, and stay till I see you on board.'

This near approach of the worst he had been vaguely dreading made Allen desperate; he lost all sense of the awe he usually felt in his father's presence; the imminence of the danger loosened his tongue, and gave him an unwonted command of words.

'Father,' he said huskily, 'I must speak to you, even if it makes you angry. You don't know what going away is to me. I can't say it in the proper words, but give me just this one chance—don't send me away this time!'

Chadwick waved his hand impatiently. 'I don't want to listen to you,' he said; 'I've made up my mind, and it's too late to change now.'

'Not too late—you can do it now if you will, if only you will! And think, father, what shall I do out in India all alone, away from you all?'

'What other young fellows do—work, I suppose, and learn to be a man.'

'I'm willing enough to work, but not there, where I can never see anyone. I'm not like other fellows: I'm not fit for the life there—I can't take to it. When you first came home you told me you meant to make up to me for the life I'd led, and that I should be a companion to you, and live like a gentleman——'

'Whose fault is it if you haven't? Not mine.'

'I don't know,' said Allen; 'I've never been taught better. I seem to go wrong without meaning it. But why did you take me away from where I was and let me live in a house like this, and know what a home was —only to be sent away from it?'

'Good God!' said Chadwick irritably, 'anyone would think you have given me no reason for acting as I do, to hear you talk!'

'I know you've got reasons,' said Allen humbly; 'I'm no credit to you, and never have been. And yet,

if you'll only try and believe it, I'm not such an out-and-out bad fellow. I know how to behave better now, and I'll act different if you'll give me another trial—you needn't forgive me, only let me stay. It—it's the being sent away from—from everyone I care for that's so hard. After all, father, I am your son: don't turn me out of the house like your father did you. You've often said you can never forgive him for that!'

'That's enough!' said Chadwick harshly; 'you've got a tongue, it appears, when you like to use it. It's all very well your appealing to me like this, but I'm not the person with most cause to complain of you. There's your step-sister—there's Margot. How can I expect her to put up with your remaining here, after the way you've behaved?'

Chadwick was shaken; his first unreasonable pride and hope in his son had long been replaced by disappointment and disgust; he had got it into his head that Allen was a sullen, vicious young cub, utterly devoid of common feeling or gratitude. This appeal of his had revealed the depth of emotion under that uncouth stolidity; the reference to his own father had struck a chord—for the first time he began to doubt whether what he was doing was in such accordance with parental justice, so manifestly the wisest and best thing to do, as he had come to consider it. And yet, after all, the boy was going to the bad at home; he was a constant source of dissension, anxiety, annoyance. Would not anyone say that a year or two

spent in India might teach him manliness, self-reliance, all that he lacked so conspicuously? Then there was his wife; he knew what she would say if he went back now from his decision; his relations with her were not too harmonious as it was. He winced in advance under the cold silent displeasure he would have to bear from her, the bitter reminders if, as was likely enough, this unfortunate Allen relapsed afresh. Yet, somehow, he felt almost apologetic to him now, desirous of laying the responsibility on others, and it was this that inspired his reference to Margot. But Allen seized on it with a sudden hope, reading in it an unexpected chance of reprieve.

'Tell me this!' he pleaded: 'if Margot was to say she forgave me, that she didn't wish me to go, would you send me away still?'

Chadwick considered. 'I'm a fool to let you talk me over like this,' he said finally, 'because I've not altered my own opinion. But if Margot came to me and said that, I don't say I might not think over it. Only, mind this: if she's against you, you go, and I won't hear any more nonsense about it.'

'If she's against me I'll go!' said Allen, 'but—but I don't think she will be; and, father, I don't know how to thank you, that I don't!'

'There will be time enough for thanks by-and-by,' said Chadwick drily; 'I'm by no means so sure that Margot will be so ready to overlook this. But we shall see to-morrow. And in the meantime—as I shall have to tell your step-mother what a fool I've made of

myself—if you'll take my advice, you'll keep out of the way.'

It was a recommendation Allen was very willing to follow; he wanted to be alone to think over this wonderful piece of happiness that had come to him—a happiness all the more exquisite, perhaps, from a certain superstitious reserve that would not allow him to make absolutely sure of it.

But what a magical change had come over his prospects in the course of one day! Here he was, restored to Lettice's good graces, with the distance between his father and himself considerably lessened, the sentence of banishment referred to one who best knew how little he deserved it. Ah! how bright a future might be before him yet!—a future in which he might repair all past mistakes, conquer all prejudices.

Margot was at breakfast the next morning—fresh and fair, and pre-occupied as she had been of late. He looked at her face with a new interest, as if to discover signs of hardness there. There were none in the broad white brow and the soft hazel eyes, nor in the lines of the mouth, which had lost its petulant and contemptuous curl of late. Even the pretty white hands seemed to touch everything with a sort of fastidious gentleness. She could not be hard to him alone!

She rose before breakfast was over to attend to Ida's. Chadwick called after her in his harsh, strident voice which made her start and shiver: 'When your sister can spare you, I want a word with you in my den—say about eleven.'

'Very well,' she said, in her low indifferent voice, 'I will come to you then.'

Mrs. Chadwick threw an anxious glance after her daughter as she left the room, and then observed: 'So you insist on leaving it to her to say whether all your plans are to be upset? I must say, Joshua, that anything more unpractical, more invidious, never——'

Chadwick looked up from his toast with a glance of sullen defiance. 'All right, Selina,' he said; 'I've had the benefit of knowing your sentiments already. If you're not satisfied with the result, settle it with Miss Margot—not me.'

Mrs. Chadwick took refuge in her letters, which quivered angrily in her hands; she evidently had a return of her doubts as to her daughter's firmness—another good omen for Allen!

He went down into the village that morning, to cheat if he could the time that would elapse before his fate was decided. It was one of those bright frosty November mornings, with a pale blue sky and a sparkle on ivied trunks and leafless boughs in the sunshine, which give the autumn landscape a pathetically fallacious look of spring.

As he walked along the hard village road he saw a sober little pony-carriage coming towards him, in which he recognised Millicent Orme. He was so full of his happiness that he could not keep it to himself just then; perhaps, too, he wanted to have his hopes confirmed by her opinion.

She saw that he wished to speak to her and stopped.

'Miss Orme,' he began shyly, and yet with a brighter look on his heavy features, 'you know what I told you the other day about my going to India?

'Yes,' said Millicent kindly, for she felt a strong interest in this poor unpopular prodigal. 'You are getting to like the idea? I am so glad, Mr. Chadwick. I was quite distressed the other evening to see how unhappy it made you.'

'It's not that,' he said; 'I hate the idea as much as ever, but I believe—it's as good as settled now—that I shan't have to go! My father said last night that he wouldn't send me out if Margot had no objection to my staying, and I expect she's speaking to him about it now.'

'What a very odd way of deciding the thing!' was Millicent's private reflection. 'Then of *course* it's all right!' she said gaily, 'and I needn't condole with you any more, Mr. Chadwick.'

'You *do* think it's all right, then?' he remarked eagerly; 'you don't think there's any chance of—of——'

'Of her insisting on your going? As if she could! Surely, Mr. Chadwick, you know her better than that. But I must say good-morning now: I've got to drive over to Tidford about my clothing-club, and I don't like to keep Pixie standing this cold weather.'

She drove off, leaving him with his last doubts removed. He walked on with a pleasure that was new to him in all the incidents of village life: the wheelwright painting a repaired wheel at the door of his

workshed, the carrier's cart with its brown tilt coming jolting by from Closeborough, the little small-paned shops, the rosy-faced cheery postman wheeling up his truck from the station, the battered grey tower of the church rising above the cheery, red-tiled roofs—he had never appreciated all this till now, when he had so nearly had to leave it all.

But at last his impatience to know made him turn back. He had not thought of it till then; but what if Margot had not only said the word that revoked his sentence, but cleared him from all suspicion too? The mere idea of such a possibility quickened his steps, but he would be content—more than content—with the lesser mercy.

On his way to the porch he passed the study window, and could not forbear from looking in. He was too early—the conference was still in progress; he could see Margot's tall slim form standing in the recess. She stood with her back turned to him, showing no more of her head than the nape of her stately neck and the upward sweep of dusky hair; her hands—those fair hands which held his fortunes—clasped behind her. His father was at his table listening, but Allen did not venture to look any longer—he went on into the house.

Then he waited in the music-room, with the door open so as to command the study, which was opposite. He had not waited many minutes when the study door opened. 'Then that's settled,' he heard his father say, with a decided accent of relief, and Chadwick came out into the hall.

Allen started up and went to meet him. 'Is it all right?' he asked eagerly; 'has she said yes?'

'Eh?' said Chadwick hastily. 'So you've been in there, have you? I've no time to answer any questions now. Margot's in there—you had better go in and ask her.'

Allen required no further permission; reassured by something in his father's manner, he burst eagerly into the study and stood face to face with Margot.

## CHAPTER IV

### TRUSTING TO A REED

Hätt' ich dich doch nie gesehen,
Schöne Herzenskönigin,
Nimmer war es dann geschehen
Dass ich jetzt so elend bin!
Nie wollt' ich dein Herze rühren,
Liebe hab' ich nie erfleht!
Nur ein stilles Leben führen
Wollt' ich wo dein Odem weht.—*Heine.*

So for the last time she was gracious to him.
*Pelleas an Et*

ALLEN burst into the study, all excitement and gratitude, to find Margot still standing in the window recess. At the sound of his entrance she turned hastily, as if anxious to escape, and then, finding retreat cut off, stood her ground.

'It's all settled, then?' he cried; 'Margot, I knew you'd make it all right! What did you say?'

She threw up her head proudly. 'I said—what I was obliged to say,' she answered.

He felt checked by her tone. 'But you're not angry about it, are you, Margot?'

'Angry—no. But it was not fair to make me the judge—it was not fair.'

'Well, I don't know,' said Allen, in his slow, puzzled

way; 'can't say I see why; but that don't signify now, and I'm all the more obliged to you for giving it in my favour, and I couldn't tell you how——'

'Stop!' she cried, with a gesture of impatient helplessness; 'oh, why can't you understand, Allen? Why should I have to tell you that you have nothing to thank me for? Your father asked me if I was willing for you to stay at home—and I——' she stopped: her voice seemed strangled in her throat.

A dreadful fear came into his face, his jaw dropped, the change of expression would have been ludicrous but for the tragedy of it.

'You—said—I was to—go?' he asked slowly. 'Is *that* what you're trying to tell me? I don't believe it, Margot. You couldn't have said it!'

For all answer she turned away in silence.

'It's true, then. Perhaps you'll tell me this: Why should you want me away? What harm should I do you by staying here?'

'I am not obliged to give my reasons,' she said haughtily, 'but as you ask, I will tell you. I can't trust you, Allen. I can't feel that you may not at some time or other repeat——'

'You can't trust me!' he cried; 'you think I should ever say a single word—after all I've gone through! You make that a reason for sending me away! When you know what I'm being sent away for—you know how I was led to do what I did, who put it into my head! Margot, you know it was you yourself! And now a word from you would keep me at home without

anyone being wiser than they are now, and you—you refuse to speak it! I don't care who hears me say so—it was a cruel and wicked thing to do—a thing you'll repent of before you die, if you've any heart in you to feel!'

She flushed hotly, her eyes darkened with anger. 'How could I know what would happen?' she cried; 'is it my fault that I thought you were at least to be depended on to that extent? And you try to throw the blame on me—to make me responsible for your weakness. If I felt sorry—and I did—you kill any pity, any sympathy in me by such a contemptible plea as that!'

'Ah!' said Allen bitterly, 'all those fine words don't deceive me. You want me out of the way, and you'll stick at nothing to get rid of me. Very well, you needn't be afraid: I shan't hinder you, I shan't open my mouth. But at least you might spare your names. You know, and I know, that if there's one of us two that's contemptible and has cause to be ashamed, it's not me—no, by God it's not!'

'That is enough!' she said in ungovernable passion. 'I will not stay here to hear such words. Think what you please, say what you please, but I will listen to you no longer. Let me go, Allen!'

She looked so regal, so commanding in her rage, that he felt a great awe of her, a horror almost at his presumption in using such words to her. He was so completely subjugated that not even her cynical treachery and desertion of him, her anger, real or simulated, could make him despise her long. After that one outburst

he could have fallen at her feet and implored her pardon. His devotion to her was of the dumb, dog-like kind which is only strengthened by ill-usage.

'Margot,' he said hoarsely, 'don't go yet—not in anger! Be a little fair to me. I—I don't know how it is, but you always manage to put me in the wrong somehow. When I said all that to you, I was mad—there was some little excuse for me. I'd expected it all to be so different. But I'd sooner bear anything than have you offended with me. If you say I must go away I will—only don't let me go without a word of kindness, just to say you're sorry, and you won't forget that I'm going to save you unpleasantness—it wouldn't hurt you to say that, Margot, and it would put a little heart in a fellow!'

She was touched, even profoundly, by the utter humility with which he spoke; her lips quivered, her eyes grew soft with a mist of tears.

'You make me sorry when you speak like that,' she said brokenly; 'Allen, I would have been kinder to you if I could, but I could not help myself. I am not strong enough to—to do what perhaps I ought. Forgive me!'

He seized her hand and hurt it by the force he used. 'That's all I wanted,' he said; 'I'd go through fire and water for you now. You can do anything you like with me, Margot, if you choose!'

She felt an instant reaction, a shrinking distaste for any further professions of this sort, which made her hand restless in his. 'And now, Allen,' she said, 'you will

spare me any more of these scenes while you are here, will you not? They are too painful. Let us meet as usual—as if all this had not been.'

'And you won't keep away any more?' he pleaded; 'I've only three more days to see you in.'

'Ida has—has not liked me to leave her much,' she said, with a certain air of conscious insincerity; 'but if it will be any satisfaction to you, I will come downstairs in the evenings while you are here.'

'You know it will!' he said eagerly. 'Thank you, Margot.'

'Now I must go,' she said nervously; 'try not to think hardly of me, Allen.'

'I don't,' he answered; 'I never can.' And so she freed herself at last from an interview which had cost her much to go through.

As for him, in the first flush of enthusiasm, roused by her sudden softening, he forgot the collapse of all his confident hopes, he forgot the fate that he was now doomed to without further chance of reprieve.

She had spoken to him kindly, he had seen her eyes sweet and bright with tears; she had asked pardon of him; he had held her hand in his—those were recollections which would accompany him to exile, and make even that endurable.

It is true that the reaction came in despair, in passionate clinging to the things he knew and loved, in black temptation to undo all his work, and keep the privilege of being in the same house with Margot. Sometimes he thought that even the penalty of her

scorn and contempt would not be too much to pay; but what if he gave up the glow and glory of martyrdom, only to discover he had done it for naught—what if Margot refused to remain after her conduct was known? The dread of such a devil's bargain as that kept him true to his resolution through all.

As Margot, her nerves still vibrating from the tension of her recent ordeal, was on her way to her room, the door of her mother's boudoir opened cautiously, and, greatly as she wished to be alone just then, she could not disregard Mrs. Chadwick's summons.

'Well?' began Mrs. Chadwick breathlessly; and then, as she noted the girl's wearied, dispirited expression, she added sharply, 'Surely you have not been so foolish, so wickedly weak, as to give way?'

'Don't distress yourself, dear!' said Margot, with a mirthless jarring little laugh, 'I have been firmness itself—he is going.'

Mrs. Chadwick caught her in her arms and kissed her rapturously. 'You good brave darling!' she cried. 'I was a little nervous lest you should be too tender-hearted to do what really is wisest and best for everyone. Ah, my dear, I can't tell you the relief it is to me!'

Margot released herself with visible impatience. 'Don't, mother!' she said in a low voice; 'don't *praise* me for it. I had to tell him myself—it was too dreadful! I hate myself for not being able to——'

'Poor child!' said her mother, 'it was cruel to expose you to such an ungrateful task. No one could expect

you to intercede for him; it would only be a mistaken kindness which you would bitterly regret at some time. Don't reproach yourself for what was so plainly your duty. And now, bathe your eyes, dear; you will find some eau-de-Cologne on my dressing-table there. The Priory people are coming over to luncheon to-day, and I can't spare you.'

Half an hour later Margot was looking, and almost feeling, as if no disagreeable questions of conscience had ever disturbed her peace of mind. It was too late to struggle now—the thing was done and could not be retracted. 'What else could I do?' she asked herself —a question to which, from such a quarter, a satisfactory reply could be safely expected.

In most civilised countries persons under sentence of death are allowed some indulgences as the fatal hour draws near; and though Allen was condemned to transportation merely, he was treated with a decided increase of consideration during those last few days at Agra House.

Lettice walked with him, throwing her weight upon his arm at that acute angle which with small maidens is a sign of very close friendship; she bestowed on him much good advice and information concerning India, gathered from random recollections from her geography books.

'I dare say you'll have an elephant all your own to ride on,' she said; 'you'll like that, Allen—it isn't like riding on a *horse*, you know,' she added considerately. 'You sit in a sort of little pew on the top and shoot

tigers in the jungalows. Papa shot lots that way. And another thing, Allen: if you meet a tiger out walking, you've only to keep your presence of mind and he'll always turn away. Are you presence-of-minded? You must practise it. Oh, and do you know that if you catch hold of a cobra by the tip of his tail he can't sting you—it's a useful thing to remember.'

Allen listened humbly, and somehow he did begin to look forward to a tropical life with more interest, with a sense of the importance he had gained in Lettice's eyes, so that her crude, childish notions and speculations were a sort of comfort to him.

And there were the evenings to look forward to—evenings to be spent in Margot's company. For she kept her promise: she appeared in the drawing-room now, instead of taking refuge with Ida. She spoke to him with a gentleness she had never shown before; she played and sang for him of her own accord, as she had seldom deigned to do for his private delectation. He little knew what it cost her to do this, and how impatiently she longed for the end to come. Margot had forced herself to make him some concessions, from what she tried to explain to herself as humanity—from what her heart told her was the impulse to atone, in ever so small a way.

Allen was easily conciliated; the evenings were all too short for him. He tried to forget all but the bliss of the present moment; but as each evening closed and he sat up late smoking in the library alone, he awoke

with a keener terror to the rapidity with which the last sands of his happiness were running out.

And towards the end, even the brief consolations on which he had reckoned were withheld in some respects. For on Saturday Reggie came home from school to spend the Sunday, and Allen waited in vain for that last ramble with Lettice through the woods and up to the Downs. Reggie had so much to tell her about his own exploits and adventures, and she was so proud of being chosen as the recipient of these wonders, that no doubt she forgot the companion whose conversation offered less novelty and excitement. And then Reggie would have been so offended if she had proposed to leave him, and he had always had a lordly contempt for his hulking step-brother. So the result was that Allen took his walk alone, and a dreary walk it was.

He went to church on the Sunday—a habit he had resumed of late. Margot was not there, having to attend on Ida, who was still in much the same condition.

He sat in the same seat as on that Sunday in April long ago, when he had been so hopeful and happy at finding himself actually in the same family as this Miss Chevening, who had once seemed so infinitely removed from him. How proud he had been of the stir they caused, of the way in which faces seemed drawn in their direction by some irresistible attraction! He had felt himself included—was he not one of them?

The home life which had looked so bright then had

had its bitter disappointments, its slights and humiliations, and yet how absorbingly interesting the mere fact of Margot's presence had made it! He had never felt properly alive before, and away from her any existence would seem colourless by comparison.

The long-jointed stove by the font gave out the same dry stuffy odour as on that spring Sunday; the November sun struggled in through the latticed panes and threw a dull red glow on a portion of the old carved rood-screen; the effigy of old Sir Leovil Hotham stared down from his upper shelf with the same torpid hauteur; and his two stiff wives on the lower grades smiled still in placid inanity over the bas-relief, where four simpering sons knelt opposite five daughters in ruffs and wimples.

The congregation was the usual one: Sir Everard and his daughter, the Eddlestones, old Liversedge, the Admiral and his family, all the Gorsecombe 'notables,' and all the village faces he had learnt to know.

And they would be there next Sunday, and for many successive weeks to come; while he—where would he be?

Trite reflections enough, but Allen was not an original thinker. It is always a little surprising and painful to think that the absence which means so much to us will have no perceptible effect on the lives of those we are leaving.

The Vicar preached in his calm, silver-modulated tones; he had chosen for his subject Paul's departure from Miletus—'And they all wept sore . . . sorrowing most

of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more'—a choice, needless to say, as accidental as it was inappropriate with regard to Allen. Yet Allen found himself drearily applying it to himself; not that he expected that anyone would either fall on his neck or weep, but wondering a little superstitiously whether they would indeed see his face no more.

And then he left off following the sermon, to indulge in almost the last bright prospect that remained now. Margot was intending to walk over to Lingford Church for the afternoon service, he knew. He meant to accompany her; he did not think she would object, and perhaps—perhaps now that all was settled, and she had no cause for reserve—she would give him some plain assurance that she was not insensible to the sacrifice he was making, that she was grateful for it and would not forget him while he was away. How proud he would feel if only she would make some such acknowledgment as that! He even fancied that she intended to do so, that she had planned this expedition for this very purpose.

He said nothing about his intention at luncheon, but before the time came when it was necessary to start he was ready in the hall, waiting to intercept Margot. Reggie came down and found him putting on his gloves.

'I say!' said Reggie, 'you're not going to Lingford, too, are you? You can't go with *us*—not with Margot and me and Lettice.'

Allen had not counted on the two younger ones being of the party—still, they would naturally walk on together: it would make no difference.

'Why, I shan't interfere with you,' he said, 'I shall walk with Margot.'

'As it happens,' said Reggie, 'we're going in the carriage, and there won't be room. I shall ask mother if you're to go!'

In the carriage! Allen's heart sank. Still, he must go; it would be something to be with her, even though the words he had hoped for would of necessity remain unsaid now. He followed Reggie into the drawing-room.

'Mother, Allen says *he's* going with us in the carriage—he can't, can he?'

'Allen, you know perfectly well the brougham will not hold four comfortably.'

'Couldn't Reggie go on the box, if he didn't mind?'

'Certainly not; he was coughing in church, and I don't want to send him back with his cold worse, poor boy; it is sure to be foggy driving home.'

'Then I'll go on the box,' he said—even that was better than nothing.

'Topham does not like having anyone sitting outside with him—it looks very bad. I really cannot see, Allen, why you should persist like this. Reggie naturally wants to see something of Margot while he is here, and I cannot remember that you were ever such an enthusiastic church-goer. You had much better stay at home and finish what packing you may have to do, instead of disturbing all our arrangements.'

'Yes,' said Reggie, 'we don't want you—any of us.

I'm sure Margot doesn't. I haven't seen her all these weeks, and you come shoving yourself in.'

'Reggie, you mustn't speak to your step-brother in that way, it's not nice,' said Mrs. Chadwick. 'But you see, Allen, it really is out of the question—so pray let me hear no more about it.'

'All right,' he said heavily. Reggie's words had convinced him already—no, Margot did not want him—nobody did.

But he went out nevertheless, and after apparently aimless tramping over sodden heath and stiff-rutted yellow roads, he came round to the plateau on which Lingford church stood with its conical grey shingled spire. Service had already begun; he knew if he went in he would not be placed near Margot, and yet he lingered outside amongst the yellow-lichened headstones, which bent stiffly over their green mounds like aged invalids sitting up in bed.

There he waited, sometimes sitting in the porch by the fluttering blue notice-sheets with lists of shooting licences, and accounts of collections, sometimes walking round by the little trench under the walls to keep warm. And the last gash of pale salmon colour in the west faded out and the fog crept up the valley below, and the windows of the church became faintly luminous in the growing darkness, as he stood there listening to the low intoning within, the choral responses, the burr and vibrating swell of the organ, the cadences of the preacher's voice.

Then the sermon ended and they sang a hymn which

was familiar even to Allen—it was 'Abide with me'—and the well-known air and words fell on his ear with a new and pathetic force as he stood under the chancel window.

> When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
> Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

Was it fancy that he could hear Margot's voice, clear and full, above the rest? He could picture her in there, between Reggie's handsome face and Lettice's sweet serious one, singing, her eyes unclouded by any thoughts of one whose comfort was fleeing, and whom she had failed to help!

Then the hymn ceased, and was followed by the solemn murmur of the benediction, and before any stir broke the silence he had turned away with a swelling heart, through the long grass, and home in the darkness.

No questions were asked as to how he had passed the afternoon. Margot imagined he had been to pay a farewell visit at the Vicarage, as, indeed, he ought to have done, for Millicent had taken the organ that morning, and he had not seen her since that meeting when he had been so mistakenly sanguine.

He never did pay that farewell visit—he felt he could not bear to tell Millicent that he was going after all.

'Margot, will you sing?' he asked that evening in the drawing-room.

'With pleasure,' she said; 'what would you like me to sing?'

He hesitated—he was not religiously inclined, and

felt more than a little awkward in making his request. 'There's a hymn,' he said at last, '"Abide with me," it's called—I wish you would sing that.'

Margot herself was not given to devotional exercises, but she consented, with a little surprise at such a choice.

'How funny that you should choose that particular hymn!' cried Lettice, who enjoyed a coincidence; 'it's the very one we had at Lingford this afternoon!'

Allen made no comment; he sat in the shadow of one of the window recesses, as Margot took her seat at the piano with Lettice by her side; there he could take in the whole interior of the room like a picture—the two at the piano, with the candle-light giving a more delicate fairness to their faces, the mellow subdued light of the shaded lamps, the firelight playing on his stepmother's handsome features, and on Reggie's graceful young figure curled up on the stool at her feet. Ah! how soon that picture would be only a picture for him!

For some reason the singing came to an end after that one hymn. Allen did not ask her to continue, not having his voice under the best control at the moment, and after a pause Margot shut the piano thankfully, and his opportunity was past. Perhaps anything else would have been an anti-climax, would have blurred the impression for him. The children went to bed, Chadwick came in and discussed in a dreary practical way the arrangements for the morrow, and soon—too soon—Allen's last evening of all had sped.

What was the meaning of the look in Margot's

eyes as they met his for one brief instant in saying good-night? Was it deprecating, compassionate, contrite—or all three? He read all that in their troubled depths, and not incorrectly. What he failed to see was the old inveterate aversion, which was there notwithstanding, latent and ashamed, but still to be divined by a clearer insight.

And now there was only one episode before him—the final parting—and, paradoxically enough, he looked forward even to that. Might she not come out of her reserve at the last, and give him some sign, written or spoken, that in the future, when she had nothing to dread, when he came back—she would prove that she was not ungrateful, would reward him for the labour he was accepting in her cause? Wild or not, the hope gave a less sombre tinge to his waking thoughts, and so was of service.

## CHAPTER V

### VESTIGIA NULLA RETRORSUM

*Bol.* Your will be done: this must my comfort be,
That sun that warms you here shall shine on me.
*Rich. II.*

I've heard that there is iron in the blood
And I believe it. Not one word? Not one!
Whence drew you this steel temper?—*The Princess.*

Unlucky Allen! Hard Fate pursued him even in the manner of his departure. A solitary outgoing lends the hero a certain impressiveness, invests him with a pathos, even when regrets are not deep nor lasting. But a triple departure with divided leave-takings is an arid and unsatisfactory affair. It was arranged that Reggie should go back to school by the same train as Allen and his father, and the young gentleman, demoralised by the short plunge into sybaritic home-life, was so overcome by leaving, even for the short period that remained before the Christmas holidays, that he almost monopolised attention.

While they were endeavouring to comfort and encourage the boy, Allen went round unnoticed to the stables and took a sad leave of his friend Yarrow. Yarrow did not understand the reason of this unusual emotion in the least, but he had the tact to conceal it.

His liquid golden eyes glowed with affection, he was lavish of an extremely muddy paw, and tugged at the chain of his kennel with a plaintive sound between a whine and a yawn which did duty for a fond farewell. 'Good-bye, old chap,' said Allen, with a rising lump in his throat.

Topham, putting the horses in the brougham close by, thought he might now suspend the contemptuous silence which he had observed towards Allen ever since his misuse of Hussar. 'That there dog 'ull miss you, Mr. Allen, sir.'

'He'll get over it soon enough,' said Allen, surly from emotion.

'Well, sir, dogs is dogs; they don't feel like Christians in course,' said Topham, a little ruffled that his overtures were not received more cordially.

In his soreness Allen was thinking just then that he would be well content if the Christian members of the family would cherish his memory as long and as affectionately as this poor undiscriminating collie; but the minutes were flying, he must go back to Margot.

In the hall Lettice met him. 'Why did you run away?' she said reproachfully. 'I have been looking for you everywhere. Isn't it *babyish* of Reggie to make all that fuss? What would he do if *he* was going to India, instead of you. I expect he would lie down and *scream*. I wanted to give you this, Allen; it's my present, and you must promise faithfully not to open it till you're quite alone.'

She put a small package tied up with ribbon in his

hand. 'Don't let anyone see,' she whispered; 'put it in your pocket—quick! and promise.'

He promised; he felt ashamed of himself for his hard thoughts, especially when Lettice added: 'It *was* unkind of me to leave you alone as I did these last two days. Reggie being at home made me forget somehow, but I do wish I hadn't—tell me you didn't mind much!'

'No, Lettie,' he said, with an untruth that was surely forgiveable, 'I—I didn't notice it.'

'I'm so glad,' she cried; 'I remembered it all at once in bed last night, and I *was* so miserable, because I am sorry you're going away—dreadfully sorry!'

Some of the servants had come up to the hall to see Allen go, more from a sense of the etiquette of the thing than any liking for Allen. Susan, as might be imagined, was occupied elsewhere, and did not take part in the ceremony.

Mrs. Chadwick was still coaxing and stuffing the inconsolable Reggie, Chadwick was giving directions about bringing down the luggage, Margot had disappeared. Allen went into the library in search of her, and found her at the window, watching the carriage as Topham brought it skilfully round the curve to the steps.

'Well, Margot,' he said, 'I'm going.'

She looked startled, uncomfortable. 'They have not put the luggage on yet,' she said for want of something better.

'No,' he said grimly, 'I've got that much time left me. Is that all you've got to say to me, Margot?'

'I—I hope you will be successful and—and happy out there,' she faltered.

'Happy!' he said. 'I don't feel as if that was very likely. Will you write to me sometimes, Margot—may I write to you?'

She coloured painfully. 'No, Allen,' she said, 'forgive me if it seems unkind, but—but I see no use in my writing to you, or you to me. We shall hear of one another through your father.'

'Are you afraid I shall put in anything about—what has passed between us?' he said clumsily. 'You needn't be.'

An angry fire shone in her eyes. 'I don't wish to write or be written to, Allen, is not that enough?'

'Oh, plenty!' he said bitterly; 'you're determined to save yourself all you can, but it don't strike me as fair, Margot, for all that!'

'Fair or not,' she retorted, 'I do not wish it. If my wish has no weight with you——'

'You know it has!' he cried; 'why else am I going at all? It's cruel to say that now. . . . Margot, you won't part from me in anger? It's more than I can bear.'

'Why did you provoke me?' she asked more gently; 'why do you press me for what I cannot give? I *am* sorry for you, Allen, as sorry as you can expect me to be, but you must accept things as they are—it is best. When you have shown more plainly that you are to be trusted——'

'Have not I shown that yet?' he cried.

'How can you ask, when you have still to be tried? But you will be brave, Allen, you will let what is past be forgotten, will you not?'

'By God, I will!' he cried fervently; as always, he could not withstand her long when she chose to speak fair words to him—he was her slave. 'Shake hands upon it, Margot.'

She surrendered one hand to him, but it glided out of his almost immediately.

'Look sharp!' cried Chadwick's voice from the hall; 'we've no time to lose.'

Margot followed to the porch. Mrs. Chadwick wisely did not in parting from her step-son affect more than an unemotional concern—a sorrow that he had not made it possible for her to be more sorry; her good-byes were interspersed with encouraging arguments to Reggie and commissions to her husband.

A last touch of Margot's hand, a last hug from Lettice, a respectful hope from the irreproachable Masterman that he would 'find himself comfortable out in India,' and Allen was in the carriage with the still tearful Reggie and his flurried, irritable father.

Then came a brief glimpse of the group on the porch-steps: Mrs. Chadwick smiling and kissing her hand to Reggie, not him; Margot leaning against a pillar, with a look of strain and tension in her face; Lettice clinging to her in quiet grief, the solemn faces of the servants banked up behind; and the carriage started with a jerk from the impatient horses, and the glimpse was gone for ever.

'We shall only just do it!' said Chadwick, taking out his watch. 'For Heaven's sake, Reggie, don't snivel like that, you'll be home again in a couple of weeks or so.'

When Margot was in the morning room, she let her arms fall to her side with a long sigh of intense relief. 'At last!' she said. 'Oh, mother, I thought Allen would never go!'

It was Lettice who heard, for her mother had lingered outside. '*Margot!*' she cried, 'how unkind —when he was so sorry to go!'

'I did not mean you to hear, darling,' said Margot, flushing; 'you don't understand—it is not that I don't feel for him, poor fellow—only one can't help being glad to get it over.'

'I'm not,' said Lettice stoutly, 'and I don't mean to be, Margot.'

What with the dismal preoccupation of the journey, of the sight of the familiar foggy London streets, and of the dinner with his father in the big hotel, Allen thought no more of Lettice's packet until he was undressing that night, when he came upon it. Years seemed to have passed since it was first put into his hands. He undid the ribbon with reverent tenderness. The parcel contained photographs of the Chevening family—they were all there—innocent Lettice had made no exceptions. There was his stepmother, upon whom the camera had produced the expression she wore in church; Ida, pretty and lackadaisical; Reggie; Lettice herself, whose childish charm and natural grace

had escaped all suggestion of posing or affectation; even Yarrow was included with his honest head on one side, looking at the operator with sagaciously observant eyes and decidedly puzzled ears; and, last of all, he came upon a likeness of Margot herself, in the summer dress she wore at Trouville, and with the expression on her face he knew best and wished most to remember.

He stood there a long time, looking at the lovely face, enigmatic for all its frank *insouciance*. He had not dared to ask for this. Lettice's thought had been a happy one—or stay, was it all Lettice's, or had not *she* some part in it? If so, what significance, what hope lay in this simple gift! With the powers of self-delusion we all have, and should be so much more miserable without, he ended by believing that this parting present had been inspired by Margot, that she meant it as a message of much that she could not say.

If he could have known the aspect in which she really regarded him, the feelings with which at that very moment she was laying her head on her pillow—miles away in Pineshire—he would have been cured perhaps of his folly. One may be the wiser—seldom the better—for a fair ideal shattered, a delusion rudely dispelled.

A day or two after Allen and his father had left Agra House, Margot received a rather mysterious little note by hand from Millicent Orme, begging her to come in that afternoon, as she wished particularly to see her alone.

So, at the appointed hour, Miss Chevening entered the faded Vicarage drawing-room, where Millicent was expecting her. It was a shabby room, where no attempt had been made to follow the latest decorative crazes; some Italian photographs in Oxford frames and some old family portraits hung on the walls, the chintz on the furniture was almost colourless, and the furniture itself of a stiff, uncompromising order of construction, and yet there was that nameless air of refinement over everything which comes not of upholstery.

Millicent, who had been preparing somewhat nervously for this interview, felt reassured as Margot came in, so bright and animated, so frankly and evidently at peace with herself and the whole world, that she could not help exclaiming as she took her visitor's hands and kissed her:

'How happy you are looking to-day, dear Margot!'

'Am I?' said Margot, smiling down on her; 'I am beginning to find life less of a burden. Ida is so much better to-day. Dr. Seaton thinks she will be able to go away very soon now. We are going to send her to Cannes for the rest of the winter with Miss Grey—an old governess of ours. Ida seems quite to like the idea. Mother won't spare me, and perhaps it is better. And now, what was it you wanted to see me about, Millicent?'

'I hardly know how to ask you, now you have come,' said Millicent.

'Ah, you want me to take one of those dreadful

classes at the Sunday school! Not again, Millicent, not after my fearful fiasco!'

'You only tried once.'

'Ah—but that once. Millicent, I took those boys on the parable of the Vineyard, and I asked them if they could tell me who was meant by "the Heir." And a terrible youth shot out his hand with a smirk and said, "Legal in'eritor of the property, Miss!" I was crushed. And they would ask questions I couldn't answer for my life.'

'You should tell them to look it out for themselves and bring you the answer by next week,' said Millicent. 'I do—they invariably forget. But it isn't that, Margot.'

'Thank goodness!' said Miss Chevening, unwinding her long boa. 'Bucolic boyhood is not at all in my line. Do you want me to visit some of your old women? If you can guarantee that they will have nothing the matter with them they will insist on showing, I don't mind. Or I'll sing for you anywhere.'

'No, no,' said Millicent, a little timidly, 'it was about something I heard in the village.'

'Well,' said Margot, 'go on, Millicent.'

'Is it really true that your brother Allen is going to India?'

'He's not my brother, you know, Millicent,' said Margot. 'Before I answer any questions about anybody, I really must ask you for some of that tea. I'm quite ravenous.'

'Oh, Margot!' cried Millicent, 'what am I thinking of?'

'I forgive you, dear. See, I am going to help myself. Where do you manage to get these delicious tea-cakes—not in Gorsecombe, surely?'

Millicent was not quite sure how far this assumption of the *gourmande* was genuine, but for the next few minutes she devoted herself to her duties as hostess. Margot always fascinated her afresh every time they met. Millicent had the heartiest, most ungrudging, admiration for her beautiful friend.

'No—really no more,' said Margot, who, however, had not displayed the appetite she had vaunted. 'If Lettie had been here, I should not have dared to be so greedy. And now, Millicent,' she added, leaning back with a little frown, 'about Allen. Surely you knew that he was leaving for India before this? It has been settled quite a long time.'

'I knew that—yes; but I understood that he would not go, after all.'

'Indeed? Who told you that, dear?'

'Your step-brother himself. He said it rested entirely with you; and he seemed so sure of your decision!'

There was a latent impatience, uneasiness, in Margot's manner. 'He said that? What else did he tell you?'

'Only that. Then—it isn't true? I am so glad. I have been hoping it wasn't!'

'Why be glad, why hope, why be interested at all, Millicent?'

'I can't help feeling a strong interest in him, poor fellow! He seemed so heartbroken at having to go, so happy at the thought of staying. I never did believe all the things that were said against him, and he has been so much steadier lately.'

'Ah,' said Margot mockingly, 'you have a weakness for the black sheep, dear. Unfortunately, I can't share it.'

'Don't say those cynical things, Margot. I know you don't mean them! And do tell me—is it true?'

'What perseverance! Is what true? That Allen is going to India? Perfectly. He is in London at this moment, I believe, but his ship sails on Monday.'

'He is to go, then? But—was it left to you to decide, and did you say he must go?'

'My dear Millicent, you make me feel like one of your little Sunday school girls! What if I said "Yes" —would you be very scandalised?'

'I can't believe it. You wouldn't be so unkind—it is not like you.'

'You *will* put me on a pinnacle, dear; it's your own fault if I slip down. You had better know the worst of me,' said Margot defiantly, 'I was asked. I said "No"—there!'

'Then it was most cruel!'

'Ah,' said Margot, with an angry flush, 'you very good people never see more than one side of a case. I should not have thought myself that there was any cruelty in wishing that he should go away where there

would be some chance of his living creditably, instead of leading the existence he did at home.'

'He was trying—trying hard—to live creditably, poor fellow! And he thought so much of you, Margot, you could have helped him so! Nugent always said that was the one chance for him. I don't know what he will say when he hears.' Millicent, with all her good intentions, was a little deficient in tact, though possibly the most perfect tact would not have availed her much better just then.

'It is very good of your brother to have so high an opinion of my influence,' said Margot haughtily; 'but I am sure that he at least would not venture to condemn me, whatever I have done, when he cannot possibly know the circumstances!'

'What circumstances? Won't you tell me, Margot?'

'Really this is too much!' cried Margot petulantly; 'you will drive me away with all this catechising and cross-questioning. I warn you I am not a meek person, Millicent; you are asking what you have no right to know—what I certainly shall not tell you.'

'Ah, Margot, I have offended you; don't think me impertinent, you know it is not mere curiosity that makes me press you like this. I want you to think a little, to have some pity, some consideration, for that poor fellow. I know he is not all he might be, that you must find him trying at times; but think what you are doing in letting him be sent away against his will, far away from everyone he cares about. He is not strong-minded or clever; he is not likely to succeed, or

wish to succeed, with no one near to care whether he fails or not. If you had seen him when he was telling me he was to go—and the last time when he was in such hope—Margot, it *does* seem so heartless in you to be sitting there so indifferent, so lighthearted even, after what you have done!'

Margot rose and threw out her supple hands with a passionate gesture. 'Do you suppose I felt nothing? that I haven't tried, yes, tried hard, Millicent, to find some other way? Do you think I don't regret it, that I shall not regret it again at times? You are wrong, Millicent, if you do. It was a strain, a terrible strain while it lasted. If I seemed lighthearted just now, well, it is my nature. I can't feel things very long at a time. I can't pretend to feel when I don't. It is settled, right or wrong, and I can't retract if I would.'

Millicent threw her arms round the girl's waist. 'If you are sincere in your regret, if you have really struggled, make just one more effort and conquer! Dearest Margot, listen to the voice that tells you you have been wrong. Whatever there may be to forgive, to bear, forgive while there is time. Don't—don't incur the awful responsibility of a ruined life which you might, if you only would, have rescued! You will do it! Tell me you will do it.'

'What is it you want me to do?' asked Margot, with more indecision than she had hitherto shown.

'It is not too late,' urged Millicent, 'he has not sailed. Write, telegraph to his father that you have changed your mind, that you wish him to stay. If he was

willing to listen to you before, he will listen now—even now at the eleventh hour. See, here is paper. I will send the telegram for you myself, and you can write at the same time!'

'No, Millicent,' said Margot. 'You are good—too good for me, but you don't understand. I can't recall him now. I don't want him recalled. Never mind why—it is so.'

'Then God forgive you, Margot! you will wish some day with all your soul that you had listened to me now.'

'Perhaps,' said Margot. 'What is done is done. If I have been wicked, I am ready to bear the consequences. In my place, Millicent, even you might find it no easier to be good—don't think too hardly of me, dear!'

'I do think hardly of you—you make me!' cried Millicent. 'I admired you, loved you so much, and now I can never think the same of you again!'

'You give me up?' said Margot wearily; 'well, if you must! And now I suppose you will have nothing but hard things to say of me?'

'I shall say nothing against you,' said Millicent. 'No one has any right to hear what you have told me—you ought to know me better than to think I should gossip about what pains me so much. Only we cannot be the friends we were.'

'If you say not,' agreed Margot; 'and now—let me go, Millicent.'

Millicent did not try to detain her, nor did she offer to kiss her at parting; she stood by the fireplace, too sorrowful and embarrassed, too indignant at her friend's

wilful hardheartedness, to have heart for any hollow civilities just then.

To Margot, accustomed to be made much of, even by her own sex, this change from Millicent's usually effusive warmth was a startling indication of how far she had fallen in her friend's opinion.

Her self-love was still tingling under the blow as she passed up through the feebly lighted village with the shafts of lamplight striking out from shop doors and windows into the foggy gloom.

'Why did I tell her?' she was thinking. 'I suppose I could not very well help it—but how frightfully near I was to giving way—actually writing what she wished! If I had—if I brought him back now—ah! it won't bear thinking of! To have him here again, to be exposed to what I know would come sooner or later—no, nothing can be so bad as that, whatever Millicent may say. She doesn't know! But I have lost her, and I liked Millicent. Now I suppose she will hate me. She will not tell *him*, though; at least, I think not—she said almost as much. I am glad of that. As to the rest—well, I must learn to put up with it. I could not do anything else but what I did, I *could* not; and to give way now when the worst is over, why, it would be madness!'

To assure oneself emphatically that the course taken was the only possible one is usually tantamount to an admission that there was at least an alternative open. But if Margot recognised that in secret, it did not change her purpose now; it is so much easier to persist passively than actively. The mere thought of Allen's

return thrilled her with repugnance, with a sort of dread of the consequences—she had but to be silent and he would go.

. . . . . .

So no message came to deter Chadwick from his intention, and Allen and his father stood a few days later on the deck of the 'Chusan,' exchanging those last words, which were even more difficult to get decently said than most last words.

'You see,' said Chadwick, as they leaned over the rail apart from the bustle, 'I'm sending you out as a gentleman, in spite of what's happened. I've supplied you with ample money to get all you can need in Bombay. I might have left that to Macdonald. But mind,' he added, 'no tricks with him. He'll keep a pretty sharp eye on you—he's had the hint from me.'

The few days of constant intercourse had of necessity brought the pair into more natural relations. Chadwick had relaxed his austerity, and made no allusions to the past. Allen felt some of his old timid affection and admiration for this masterful, liberal-handed (for Chadwick could spend money freely when he chose) father of his, in spite of the harshness of his treatment.

Something in these last words, however, struck Allen with a humiliating suspicion. 'Do you mean,' he said, looking down on the thick green water, 'that you've told him why I'm being sent away?'

'Macdonald has been with me several years,' said Chadwick, a little awkwardly. 'I have no secrets from him—naturally.'

'Then—you *did* tell him?' said Allen, with a sullen blackness gathering on his face.

'Well, yes, if you must have it, I did,' was the answer. 'What difference does it make to you? You can't expect me to treat you as if you were to be trusted just yet!'

'I didn't think you'd have told—but it don't signify now,' said Allen; 'and—and—when will you take me back?'

'It's early to speak of that,' said Chadwick, 'before you have even started. I shan't have you back till I hear you are in a position to make your own way, making money instead of spending it. If you're steady and have decent luck, you may, with Macdonald at your elbow, make a very good thing of those concerns out there—anyway, I've given you your opportunity. But don't expect me to open my doors to you unless you come back with something to show for the time you've been away. There, I don't want to use hard words now—there's the bell ringing. Good-bye, and let me hear that you're trying to do better.'

'Good-bye,' said Allen mechanically; 'and, father, you'll give Lettice and—and Margot my love when you get home to-night?'

'Yes, yes, I'll tell them, if I think of it—good-bye.'

They shook hands and parted, Chadwick going on shore with a doubt whether, after all, he need have been so frank with Macdonald. 'But it will keep the boy steady,' he reflected, 'to know there's an eye on him.'

Allen stood on the deck as the big ship churned her

way down the Thames. Two ideas held possession of him. He was not to hope to come back, to see Margot again, until he was making money. Macdonald—the man with whom he was to live, who was to instruct him how to fulfil this condition—had been informed that he was a thief!

And here he passes from our view for a while, going out heavy-hearted to his undeserved exile, which he could have spared himself, as another could have spared him, by a word.

Obstinacy, pride, and that chimerical half hope of his had kept him silent, and, now his sacrifice was accomplished, he felt a great doubt, a great despair. He was still only beginning to count the cost of what he had done. A great fool—this inarticulate, impressionable, muddle-headed Allen—and yet the nature which was capable of such folly could not have been utterly ignoble, and might so easily have been saved from sinking, if one person had not chosen deliberately to hold back, and see him borne away.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE BEST THING FOR EVERYBODY

I will redeem all this
And, in the closing of some glorious day,
Be bold to tell you that I am your son.
*Hen. IV. Pt.* 1, *A.* 3.

THE weeks that succeeded Allen's departure were weeks for Margot of profound calm and peace. With him the disturbing element seemed to have been eliminated; she was no longer jarred by a perpetual false note, the new dread he had begun to inspire was gone. She had not now to be perpetually on her guard, the reproach of his dull misery was not visible, day by day, hour by hour—she had nothing further to fear from her own weakness. And things went better at home, too. Her step-father was quieter, less carping and irritable. So far from resenting the part his wife and daughter had taken, he was secretly almost grateful to them for enabling him to escape from a difficult position without scandal or any appearance of harshness. Ida was away at Cannes under Miss Grey's charge, and already she seemed, from the accounts of her, to be slowly recovering tone, and emerging from the unnatural torpor and

apathy which the shock she received at Bournemouth had left. Up to the very last she had never referred to the past, and Margot had scrupulously refrained from forcing her confidences. Ida would soon see the folly of taking Camilla Henderson's deceit and desertion so tragically; it was only ill-health and hyper-sensitiveness that made her do so at all; and when she came home again, there would be no Allen to ruin her nerves by stupid petty persecutions, as it seemed he had been doing. Yes! when she thought of that, she felt justified. She seemed to herself to have been less influenced by her own personal interests and prejudices; all ugly whispers of her conscience were silenced—yes, he deserved it, it would have been weakness to have acted otherwise than as she had done.

As Christmas came on, she found herself brought into constant contact with Millicent Orme; there were church decorations, school-feasts, carol-singing, from which she could not withdraw. But, though Millicent was changed, the difference was imperceptible to all but Margot, who soon came to accept it as a minor and inevitable evil which it was easy to forget in the consciousness that, in Gorsecombe generally, and the neighbouring houses, her presence was becoming in growing request. It was pleasant to her to be received with universal homage wherever she and her mother appeared—at a meet, a skating party, or a dance—to have a consoling consciousness that few people would find it possible to condemn her, even if they knew what she had told Millicent.

Would Millicent's brother be as severe? He was coming down for a few days at Christmas—she would be sure to meet him. Would he ask inconvenient questions, call her to account? She had disregarded his opinion about the uselessness of sending Allen to college, and the result had proved him right—what would he say now? Well, let him say what he pleased, let him withdraw his friendship—what did she care? His displeasure or disapproval could not affect her. If he presumed to take her to task, she would show him once for all that she would suffer no interference. Nevertheless, this indifference of hers did not prevent her from feeling decidedly nervous on their first meeting. But his manner reassured her—impossible to doubt that he was glad to see her, that so far he was in no critical mood. It was only a brief greeting, a few words during the walk home on Christmas Day, but it was enough to reassure her for the present. It was not till some days later that she had any lengthened conversation with him. The Eddlestones were giving a Christmas party.

'You must come,' Fay Eddlestone had said to Margot; 'we're not going to have any children, and we're all going to be babies and play games.'

Nugent Orme, who was one of the invited, arrived rather late to find the unfortunate Fanshawe, with his eyes bandaged, puffing frantically at a bust on a bracket under a delusive impression that he was blowing out a lighted candle, which Miss Chevening was holding, as she stood in the centre of the room, watch-

ing his performances from a distance with calm and rather malicious appreciation.

Orme was more impressed than ever by her singular beauty and distinction. There were pretty girls in the room, but they seemed provincial beside her, her slight, half-pitiful, half-disdainful smile made their laughter hoydenish by comparison.

She saw him standing in the doorway, and threw him a glance of recognition, with a charming upward movement of her chin as if she wished him to understand that she declined to be held responsible for her part in the proceedings; and presently the curate was unbandaged at her intercession, and she retired from office.

As she stood aside during the animated discussion of rival forms of diversion that followed—everyone loudly advocating some capital game that no amount of explanation could make comprehensible to the rest—Nugent made his way to her.

'Did you know Mr. Fanshawe could be so amusing?' she asked.

'Poor Fanshawe! how many victims have been sacrificed to provide mirth!'

'It isn't fair to come late,' she declared, 'when we are all steeped to the lips in frivolity. How much more childish grown-up people can be than real children at this sort of thing! Children always have a feeling that there's something unnatural and wicked in playing games in their best frocks. We have thrown all our dignity to the winds long ago.'

'I can't quite imagine you taking a very violent share in these exercises,' he said, with a half-glance at her unflushed cheeks.

'You were not here, you see. And really, it would have been too barbarous to stand looking on while the Admiral and both the Miss Malkins and a whole host of quite elderly people were sitting on the floor, trying to blow a feather across a table-cloth. Wouldn't it?'

'Clearly,' he agreed; 'but what are they all doing now? It seems a comparatively mild form of revelry.'

It did; the company were seated on chairs in a circle solemnly passing a table-spoon from one to the other, each recipient having to answer the question—'Crossed, or Uncrossed?'

'The chief beauty of that,' she explained, 'is that it makes people so angry when they find out the catch. See how red the Admiral is getting—he has said "Crossed" the first round, and "Uncrossed" the second, and been wrong both times. He thinks he has found out now, and that it depends on whether the spoon is offered to him by the bowl or handle. Poor deluded old gentleman!'

'And what *does* it depend on?'

'Simply on the position of the questioner's feet. *Isn't* it ridiculous? There, the Admiral won't play any more till he is told what he's playing at—the spoon is beginning to pall already.'

'And what will come next? Not,' he said, with genuine apprehension, '*not* Dumb Crambo?'

'We have long passed the Dumb Crambo stage,

she said; 'I think there will be a lucid interval now. From the expression in Pussy Eddlestone's eye, I feel almost certain she is going to recite 'Curfew shall not ring to-night.'

'You call that a lucid interval?'

'Well, it will cool people down. But I am wrong. Mrs. Eddlestone is collecting victims for some new imbecility—you will have to join, Mr. Orme.'

'I draw the line at having to go down on my hands and knees, then,' he said, 'and I invariably cheat when I am blindfolded.'

And Nugent, much against his will, had to relinquish Margot's society for a lively, but not highly intellectual, pastime known as 'Tibbets,' which consisted in passing a paperweight from hand to hand under a table-cover, and guessing at a given moment in whose hand it was concealed.

At last the fate to which a party on these principles is always liable was fulfilled in this instance. Some weaker brother in a guilty and anonymous fashion proposed dancing, an accomplice played the opening bars of a waltz, and, as if by magic, the room was cleared and several couples revolving before the elder people had fully realised that, as far as they were concerned, the evening was over.

'Will you give me this?' Margot heard Nugent asking her with some eagerness, and she felt a secret triumph as she assented—he at all events did not think so very badly of her.

She recognised with satisfaction that he danced well,

and that she might resign herself to his steering without dread of d'saster, but, before they had made many turns, her pleasure was rudely dispelled by a remark of his.

'So I hear Allen is on his way to India?' he said. His tone was casual enough, and yet Margot had a sudden misgiving—an utterly unfounded one—that his carelessness was assumed, that he had heard something, and had asked for this dance with a view to finding out the truth from her own lips. She was thankful that she need not let him see her face. 'Why was it,' she wondered, 'that this miserable Allen was for ever coming between them?'

'Yes,' she said; 'who told you?'

'My sister.' Margot made a sign to stop. Millicent had told, then; what folly it had been to make that unfortunate admission! She would have given much to be able to go on dancing, but she felt it impossible just then.

'One can't talk with any satisfaction and dance too,' she said; 'suppose we sit down in this window-seat—oh, I would rather talk, really.'

He could do nothing but agree. The window-seat was a place in which conversation could be carried on without fear of interruption or disturbance; she sat there silent for a moment, with a hard brightness in her eyes.

'Let me see,' she said, 'what were we talking about? Oh, about Allen. Did Millicent tell you why he went?'

'She didn't seem to know much about it,' he said; 'I thought you would give me some information, perhaps. It seemed such an odd notion of his to take up indigo-planting in that sudden way.'

Margot's suspicion vanished; he spoke in such palpable good faith that she was convinced that, after all, Millicent had kept her own counsel, which was a guarantee that she would continue to keep it. He thought it was Allen's own idea—why should she not let him remain under this impression?

'What is there so very odd about it?' she said.

'Well, he can hardly know much of the business, can he?'

'As much as most people who go out. And there is the agent there. Surely it is better for him to be leading an active, industrious life than idling at home, Mr. Orme?'

'Then you had some share in bringing it about?'

For an instant her suspicion returned—was there some covert irony in his words?

'What do you mean?' she said.

'Why, that I presume his father required a little persuasion to consent to such a plan, and that you spoke in favour of it. Am I wrong?'

'I did speak in favour of his going,' she said. 'Have you any fault to find with that? If you have, please say so.'

'Fault?' he cried, 'good heavens, no! What right have I to find fault? It was a healthy sign that Allen

should want something to do, and, if only the fancy lasts, it may be the best thing for him.'

'I meant—do you blame me?'

'Blame you? On the contrary, I wish I could tell you how good I think it was of you to enter into his feelings, to interest yourself in getting his father to consent.'

There was no mistaking the sincerity of his eyes and voice as he said this, but she shrank inwardly under it as if at the keenest sarcasm. So far as was possible, she would not be a hypocrite; he need not, must not, know that she had sent Allen to exile against his will, in spite of his passionate entreaties, but at least she would not accept praise from his lips.

'Don't say that,' she said quickly, 'when you know how I used to speak and think of him!'

'I know,' he said; 'but I know, too, what efforts you made to conquer your feelings, and how you succeeded.'

She felt irresistibly impelled to shake this excessive faith in her, to be as candid as she dared, without telling the whole truth.

'Did I?' she said; 'ah, you don't know! Mr. Orme, what would you say if I told you I was *anxious* for him to go—for—for my own sake as much as his?'

Nugent was touched; he only saw in all this the self-reproach of a wayward but sweet nature for a prejudice which was natural enough—she seemed more lovable, more human, in this softened mood.

'Even then,' he said, 'I suppose you could not help it. You are so different from him, poor fellow! You could

not be expected to do more than bear with him, to help him to better things. And that you have done.'

'I *do* want him to do well!' she urged eagerly, as if for her own satisfaction; 'I should be wretched if he were to fail now.'

'Do you suppose I doubt it?' he said; 'and, depend upon it, he feels that too, the knowledge of it will do more than anything else to keep him straight.'

'And you think he will succeed—will be happy there?' she questioned.

'I think there is every chance of it,' he said. 'The life is his own choice, he will have plenty to do and fewer temptations to go wrong—there will be the sense of responsibility to steady him. I am sure there is no reason why you should make yourself unhappy. You, at all events, have done your best for him.'

'I like to hear you say that,' she said, 'even if—— And you won't let anything make you think very badly of me, Mr. Orme? I want you to promise that.'

It needed some effort on Nugent's part to restrain some desperate assurance which would reveal his passion. But he dared not risk offending or alarming her. He had no right at present to be more than her friend; he would not forfeit that position by any rashness.

'There is no need to promise,' he said; 'nothing can ever do that; still, since you wish it, I promise.'

'You must not forget,' she said, and the next moment she seemed to have thrown off all troublesome thoughts with the ease and suddenness of a child. 'How seriously we have been talking!' she said; 'it is silly to

trouble about what cannot be helped now. Shall we finish this waltz—we shall have time for one or two turns if you care about it?'

She said no more about Allen; for the remainder of the evening she was her light-hearted, careless self, fascinating as she always was and could not but be in his eyes, though he preferred her in her graver mood.

He walked back to the Vicarage with Millicent, speaking very little of that evening's festivities, and Miss Chevening not at all. His love, which had hitherto been of a visionary, unpractical kind, with which his eye had had more to do than his judgment, had just begun to seem real and actual. Why should he not hope? She did not care for him as yet—how should she?—but she did not treat him as an ordinary acquaintance. Henceforward the thought that he might one day succeed in winning her heart should be something more than a dream, he would set it before him as a possibility to be realised, which his whole happiness depended upon his realising.

Perhaps, even then, Margot was very far from being indifferent to him; with all her self-will, she was capable of feeling a woman's delight in submission to a stronger nature, and there was an impression of power and character in what she knew of Nugent Orme that had attracted her from the first. Nor was she blind to the fact that he admired her, that if she chose he would be at her feet. But now she became afraid of allowing herself to drift. Why did Nugent persist in thinking her so much better than she was? She was

almost angry with him for not reading her more truly. If she let herself love him and he were then to learn the truth—what then? She knew very well that there would be no weakness in his love. She had deceived him as she had not deceived Millicent: she would have to tell him, humble herself before him, perhaps see him turn from her—ah, no! she would not expose herself to these unnecessary humiliations. She would stifle any dangerous tendencies while there was time; it would cost her little as yet to cast him out of her thoughts, nothing in comparison with what it might in the future.

And so on the only other occasion when she met him before his return to town, he found her altered to him in a manner which he felt, though he could scarcely define the change. He accepted it without betraying any discomposure, and made no effort to resume a more intimate footing; but he went back to chambers slightly disheartened, though very far from despairing.

'He doesn't really care for me after all,' thought Margot, when she heard he had gone; 'if he had, he would have come up, just to say good-bye. I am glad. I *want* him not to care!'

Susan's mind had been greatly exercised as to the real reasons for Allen's departure. From what he had incautiously said, she was led to hold Miss Chevening chiefly responsible, a conclusion which did not tend to lessen the already vigorous hate she felt for her young mistress.

It might be thought that, seeing that Susan's charms had proved powerless with Allen, his absence could not reasonably be held any personal injury to her; but hate is no logician—she chose to consider that he would have succumbed to her sooner or later had not Miss Margot wantonly bewitched him. That Margot cared one straw for him, she knew was impossible, but to Susan's vulgarly spiteful mind it seemed probable enough that she had chosen to amuse herself at his expense sooner than go without admiration.

And a fact that had come to her knowledge lately had confirmed her in these views. Young Barchard, who had a keen eye for a pretty face, had thrown himself in her way of late, and Susan, very well able to take care of herself, had not repulsed him, though she was quite aware of the character he bore, and put him in a different category altogether from her respectable village admirers. But, as a former companion of Allen's and as a young man with more smartness and style than most Gorsecombe swains affected, he was not without his recommendations, and nothing was more natural than that their conversation should sometimes fall upon young Mr. Chadwick, and that Barchard should mention that curious incident of a letter in a female hand with a Bournemouth postmark which was to be secretly delivered.

'And you didn't think to open it to see what was inside?' said the ingenuous Susan.

''Twasn't any business of mine,' he replied, 'and, besides, there was a seal on it.'

'Ah,' said Susan, 'I'd have managed it, seal or no seal, if it had been me.'

'Trust you!' he said, with a grin of admiration.

But Susan thought a good deal about this mysterious letter. Was it that which had decided master to send Mr. Allen away? Had Margot written it? There must have been something underhand about it, or it would not have been addressed under cover instead of openly to the house. And to think that she could find out nothing!

It is said that servants know everything of their employers' affairs; and, owing to the carelessness with which in most households allusions are made in their presence, they do know a great deal. Few credit their domestics with any ears or intelligence, but, for all that, many a Hercules—more or less distorted, but recognisable—is constructed in the kitchen from a fragmentary foot picked up in the dining-room. Here, however, the utmost caution had been observed; no one below stairs, not even the infallible Masterman, knew more than the bare facts that Mr. Allen had been sent out to foreign parts at very short notice, and that he did not seem to fancy going.

Susan had tried to extract information from Lettice; but, child as she was, Lettice had an instinctive feeling that she ought not to chatter of family troubles to an inquisitive maid. 'I don't think mother would like me to talk about it, Susan,' she had said, with the little air of dignity she could take at times; 'and besides, you know, I don't know myself why poor Allen went.

Only I'm sure it wasn't for anything wrong he had done.'

One evening Susan, who occasionally acted as Margot's maid, was brushing Miss Chevening's hair, when it occurred to her to try the effect of a few judicious remarks. She was always demure and attentive with Margot, who had no suspicion of the venomous resentment that smouldered under that trimly-aproned bosom. We all walk at times, undismayed because unwitting, under the masked guns of some bitter secret hatred. Margot had entirely forgotten the girl's imaginary Trouville grievance, but if she had thought that the other remembered, she would have been more amused than alarmed—what harm could Susan do to her?

'It seems quite like a different house without Mr. Allen, don't it, miss?' began Susan.

Miss Chevening raised her eyebrows. 'Does it?' she said, 'I don't quite see how his being away can affect you, Susan.'

Susan felt a vicious longing to tug the beautiful bronze tresses she was handling.

'You don't, don't you, you stuck up 'aughty thing!' she thought, 'but perhaps it affects me as well as my betters.'

'In course I was not eluding to myself, miss,' she said, 'being only a domestic; I was thinking of the difference it would make to you.'

'Don't trouble to think, then,' said Miss Chevening, 'because really it is no concern of yours.'

'Even servants has their feelings, miss,' retorted Susan, 'little as you seem to give them credit for it; I'd no intention of taking any liberty in what I said, I'm sure.'

'Don't be a goose,' said Margot; 'I am not offended, only—well, I don't care to discuss Mr. Allen with anybody.'

'Very good, miss,' said Susan, with inward rage. 'We'll see if I can't touch you yet, my lady!' her thoughts ran.

'That young man, Barchard, *he*'ll miss Mr. Allen, miss,' she continued.

'Still Mr. Allen?' said Margot, a little impatiently; 'will he, indeed, Susan?'

'Well, miss, judging by the friends they were. That young Barchard, they do say, was a sort of "fat-totalum," as they call it, to Mr. Allen. I thought you was aware of that, miss. Why, if anyone was sending him a letter, they didn't want noticed—and you know, miss, young gentlemen—well, they do get letters of that sort sometimes—they'd send it——'

Susan had succeeded in disturbing her mistress's equanimity at last; two angry roses burnt in Margot's cheeks as she interrupted her.

'That will do, Susan; I've no wish to hear gossip of that sort. And you can go now. I will finish brushing my hair myself.'

Susan retired, not without satisfaction. If she could only be sure that there was something about that letter which was not known, which Miss Margot wished

concealed—if she could only find it out! Unhappily, she was as far from settling that important point as ever, and in the meantime she was powerless.

Some days after this they were at breakfast one snowy January morning, when Chadwick, who was opening his letters, gave an angry exclamation. Margot looked up, and was astonished at the black fury which contorted his face.

'Have you had bad news?' inquired her mother, with a languid interest.

'Bad news!' he said with a scowl. 'I don't know if you would call it bad news—there, read it yourself!'

He flung a letter across the table written in a slovenly, half-commercial hand. 'Why, it's from Allen!' exclaimed Mrs. Chadwick, glancing at the signature, 'and dated from Madras.' I thought it was Bombay he was going to?'

'Don't talk about it,' he stormed; 'read it. The infernal, ungrateful young villain, the double-faced blackguard, to trick me like this!'

Mrs. Chadwick read it and handed it on to Margot. It was a piteous, confused epistle; he implored his father not to be angry with him, because he could not, after all, go out to the plantation; he would have done it, he declared, but for what his father had said about having told the agent everything; he could not bear living with a man who had been told he was a thief and wanted looking after. He was going to seek his fortune

in another place, in another way, where no one would know anything against him. He hoped before long to come back—rich.

'How can he seek his fortune?' cried Mrs. Chadwick; 'he must be mad—he has no money.'

'Like the fool I was,' said Chadwick, 'I gave him some. I thought I could trust him that little way on board ship. And he's made off with it!'

Margot looked up from the letter. 'Did you really tell him that you had told your agent?' she asked. 'Was that true?'

'It's true enough,' said Chadwick; 'how was I to send him out there without giving Macdonald a hint?—it was only fair to him.'

'But you need not have let Allen know!' she cried.

'I meant to show him he'd better be on his best behaviour,' he said surlily; 'but that's only an excuse—he meant to give me the slip all the time. I see that now.'

'Joshua,' said his wife, 'the next thing will be that he will come back here!'

'Will he?' thundered Chadwick, '*will* he? Let him come—and see how he is received! I swear, if he dares to show his hang-dog face here, I'll turn him out. I've borne with him for the last time. He's no son of mine. I disown him—he may go to the dogs, and die with them for all I care. You hear me, Selina? Never mention his name to me again—nor you,' he added to Margot; 'tell that child to hold her

tongue, and the boy too. I'll have no chattering about it, make them understand that, or it will be the worse for all of them!'

He rose from his untasted breakfast and closed the door violently after him, leaving Margot and her mother looking at one another in silent terror.

'This is very dreadful, darling,' said Mrs. Chadwick at last.

'Very,' said Margot; 'do you think—will he do what he says?'

'Your step-father? Undoubtedly. He is very angry, and no wonder. He makes me quite afraid when he is like that. But—I suppose it is wicked to be glad—but I can't help it. We shall never be troubled with that wretched boy again, now. If he came back he would not be received.'

Margot gave a little shudder. 'Mother,' she said, 'don't talk like that just yet—it is too horrible! When I think that if it had not been——' She broke off: she could not finish the thought in words.

'My dear,' said Mrs. Chadwick, 'I can understand your feeling a little distressed. But no one can tell—I can never describe to you—the horror I had of that boy. I can't pretend to be anything but very thankful that he has relieved us of himself like this, though, of course, I can be sorry for him too.'

And Margot, though she hated herself for it, was conscious, too, beneath her remorse, and pity for the misguided, neglected Allen, of that same odious thankfulness and relief that, come what might, she would

never now live in the same house with him—that she was safe from him for the future.

Only Lettice bewailed the news in secret with a sorrow unalloyed by any selfish considerations. He had been so kind to her in those last few days; that rough brother who was always in disgrace; he had looked so sad at having to go—and now he had been really wicked, and she would never see him any more. She sobbed herself to sleep that night, thinking of him out in the darkness all alone, with no one allowed to love him or speak to him ever again.

But no other tears were shed for Allen.

# Book V

## JUDGMENT *v.* INCLINATION

## CHAPTER I

### IN DOUBT

THE history of the Chadwick household during the fourteen months that followed Allen's final fiasco may be told in very few pages. Of what had become of him they heard, and perhaps preferred to hear, nothing; in the house his name was never mentioned; it was understood that Chadwick had altered his will. He was reticent on the subject of his son, but nevertheless it was generally known in Gorsecombe that the young man had gone completely to the bad, which surprised few, though the more charitable thought that his step-mother might have done more to prevent it, had her interest lain in that direction.

Disappointed in his own son, Chadwick set himself to find what consolation he might in his step-children. He was gratified by all the admiration they excited; it flattered him most of all when strangers assumed that they were actually his children. He prided himself on the indulgence with which he treated them. Margot had a horse of her own now, and Lettice a pony; he liked to be seen riding about the country with them; he liked them to have every advantage that his wealth could give. Vanity, and the mortification Allen had

caused him, had more to do with this than any real affection for the Chevenings. He was never quite at his ease with them—never without a secret consciousness of a subtle difference between himself and them that met him at every turn. Even Lettice submitted a little unwillingly to his rough caresses, and did not chatter so freely to him as to others. Margot's behaviour to him gave him nothing to find fault with; she had found herself unable to refuse the favours he showered upon her, and would not be guilty of the meanness of accepting everything without making all the return in her power. But though she was dutiful, and even grateful, she could not bring herself to pretend an affection she did not feel; it was all she could do sometimes to conceal the shudder caused by some fresh revelation of the man's essential coarseness of fibre.

Ida stood lowest in his favour. She had come back from the south of France with no trace of the crisis she had passed through; in fact, she seemed to have erased the very memory of it from her mind. But she was still delicate, with a sensitiveness that he characterised as 'finical.' She allowed him to see that she shrank from him, which irritated him. It was lucky for Ida that her elder sister was always at hand to avert an outburst, and bring Chadwick back into good-humour.

As for Chadwick's relations with his wife, they had not become closer with time, though there was nothing in their behaviour to one another to show that either regretted the union. The world—the local world of Gorsecombe, that is—called Mrs. Chadwick an admir-

able wife, and considered that she had accomplished marvels in improving her husband's position.

There had been no pretence of love between them; he had admired her, and did so still; he had wanted a handsome, well-bred woman of the world to preside over his house and attract local society; he had all he had bargained for, and more, for he had not expected to triumph so instantly and completely over the prejudice that had surrounded him as this marriage had enabled him to do. But for all that, he was not content; he found himself too much eclipsed by his wife; he knew too well that people came to his house and invited him to theirs for her sake; that he personally was little, if at all, more popular than before.

He had not, as he had hoped, been put on the Commission of the Peace; he was not asked to join shooting-parties in the autumn; he was not made to feel that he was an important or a welcome presence anywhere. People were civil to him, and that was about all—and he cursed their civility in his soul.

Though he would not allow it to himself, he had realised none of his expectations; he was more lonely here in this big house, with all those fair young faces about him—he was less of a power, in spite of all his money, than he had been out on his Behar plantations. Sometimes it came home to him bitterly enough, that that graceless, good-for-nothing son of his had, after all, been the only person who had really looked up to him or cared for him. But Allen had sinned past all forgiveness; having chosen to cut himself off from the only

means of retrieving his disgrace, he was less than a stranger henceforth, and it was useless to think of what might have been.

To forget all gloomy reflections of this sort, Chadwick had recourse to a means that he was already too much inclined to seek—he drank. No one—not even his wife—suspected the extent to which the habit had grown upon him; he only indulged it when alone, and the only effect wine had hitherto had upon him was to render him more taciturn.

His wife and family saw less of him in the evenings; he allowed them to do very much as they pleased, even if he snarled occasionally under Mrs. Chadwick's rather frequent and increasing demands on his purse.

As the second spring after Allen's departure approached, she had begun cautiously to sound him as to the desirability of a house in town for the season. Many of the best people in their Pineshire set were going to spend the summer in London; Ida was eighteen now, and Margot had never been presented; it was so tiresome to have to live in Gorsecombe all the year round, so necessary for the girls to see more of society, and so on. Chadwick had resisted at first, until he found that his own presence in town would not be indispensable, when he began to see that the plan might have its advantages. He would be relieved from the oppression of his wife's society, free to live his life as he chose without having to study appearances, and act as host to people who had no interests in common with him.

So Chadwick had ended by giving his consent, and a house had been found on the Bayswater side of Hyde Park, with which his wife (although she would have preferred something in Mayfair) declared herself tolerably well satisfied. A stronger motive than the mere desire to get back into the movement after so many years of enforced abstention had prompted Mrs. Chadwick. Young Guy Hotham had left Oxford, and was to read for the Bar in town, where he would share Nugent Orme's chambers. She had reason to suspect that the young man was beginning to have a decidedly soft place in his heart for Ida. What a triumph if Ida could succeed in carrying off such a prize in her first season! She had grown very pretty of late, and young Hotham, at all events, seemed to find her more attractive than her elder and lovelier sister, of whom he stood a little in awe. And Ida in her limp way was ready enough to return his liking. Lady Adela might not approve of such a match, but she would not be in town, and even she could hardly find a serious objection. Of course it would have been better had Margot been the chosen one, but Margot was provokingly blind to her own interests and refused all guidance in these matters. She had already refused young Hopwood Maltby, the eldest son of the wealthy brewer, a quite unexceptionable *parti*, who had every chance of being a peer some day, and her only reason had been the ridiculous pretext that she did not like him well enough to marry him.

Mrs. Chadwick knew well that it was hopeless to attempt to constrain her eldest daughter's affections;

she was heartwhole, to the best of her mother's knowledge; the intimacy with the Vicarage, which had seemed dangerous at one time, had died away; the only thing to be done was to trust to Margot's face bringing her some piece of good fortune that even she would have no heart to throw away.

If she had known more of her daughter's heart she would have felt less sanguine. Seldom as Margot had seen Orme during the past year, she was farther than ever from forgetting him; the circumstance she felt most keenly in Millicent's withdrawal was that she heard so much less of him. She thought she was almost certain that he had cared for her a little at one time; his manner when they met had changed since then—had he found some greater attraction in London? She knew nothing, and was afraid to attract Millicent's suspicion by any questions as to her brother's doings. It did not occur to her that she herself was chiefly responsible for Nugent's change of manner. The dread she had felt had worn off; she had come to think, or persuade herself that he would think, Allen's desertion a sufficient justification of her conduct towards him; if he was inclined to blame her, she believed it would be possible to bring him to adopt her views. She hoped he had forgotten Allen altogether, for he had made no allusion to him of late; yet at times she feared that this silence was a sign that he knew and condemned. But Millicent had promised not to repeat that unlucky confidence—it could not be that. In London she would meet him more often, and be better able to judge.

It was strange, even to herself, that her thoughts should be so frequently busy with speculation on this meeting, and that the retention of his good opinion had come to possess such a growing importance for her.

Some instinct warned her that, for her own sake, she should not think of him as more than a friend, and that it was safest to see as little of him as possible, but that did not alter the sharp dread that overcame her at the mere idea of finding that his very friendship was no longer hers. It would be terrible if he had come to dislike or despise her—worse, if he were merely indifferent; and she must wait for certainty until they met each other face to face.

. . . . . .

Spring found Mrs. Chadwick and her daughters established in their new quarters, which not everyone would have considered a good exchange for a country house full of light and air and fragrant garden-breaths. This London mansion was tall and narrow, dark as to its staircase and back rooms, which looked out upon a deep stucco well or shaft. But then it possessed what the estate agent's bills termed 'spacious reception rooms,' furnished, it is true, with the chilly and unhomelike meagreness—something between the appointments of superior lodgings and an inferior hotel—of a house that has never been a home. However, it faced the great main road and the Park railings and wide stretches of green turf beyond. To Mrs. Chadwick, and perhaps to her two eldest daughters,

there was something inspiriting and exhilarating in the very din of the traffic that rolled and clattered all day past their windows. Only Lettice, at lessons with her new governess in a dark little room at the rear, seemed losing her colour and spirits.

The almond blossom had begun to brighten the grimy squares, and the murderous east wind had not had time as yet to mow down the crocuses, drawn up in lines like young conscripts, along the garden walks. It was late in the afternoon and the Chevening girls were in the big drawing-room with their mother, having just returned from a drive in the Park; Lettice was reading diligently in the window.

'And what have you been doing with yourself this afternoon, pet?' asked her mother.

'Oh, Mademoiselle and I had a walk,' said Lettice, in a tone that implied some contempt for this exercise as practised in London. 'We went along the Serpentine, and there was a boy sailing his boat there—at least it would only sail bottom upwards. And I lent him Mademoiselle's umbrella to reach it with. I don't think Serpentine boys are very polite, for he didn't even say "Thank you." Mummy, I do wish we could have brought Yarrow with us!'

'Poor Yarrow hasn't been well lately, dear, and London isn't good for him.'

'Do you know,' said Lettice, 'I think Yarrow and I must have the same kind of constitution. London isn't good for *me* either. Even Chiswick was more country than this?'

Mrs. Chadwick was stroking Lettice's hair. 'I must take you to have some of this cut off,' she remarked.

'Must you?' said Lettice; 'don't, mother. I like it long—it's company for me when I'm reading.'

'Never mind about the tea just now, Margot,' said Mrs. Chadwick as Margot was preparing to attend to her usual duty; 'Ida must pour me out some for once. I want you to look at that list on the writing-table, and see if I have left anybody out who ought to be there.'

Margot took up the list. She and Ida were to be presented next week, and Mrs. Chadwick was asking all the people she knew in town to look in after the ceremony. Margot's eyes ran rapidly down the names of those who were to be written to: the one name she wished to find there was absent. Could she trust herself to suggest its inclusion without betraying the interest she felt? She sat there undecided, playing with the paper as her eyes looked idly out over the Park and the trees whose bare branches were already showing knotted outlines against the pale rose and amethyst sky.

'Well, Margot,' said her mother, 'is everybody there?'

'I think so, unless—haven't you forgotten Mr. Orme?'

'It didn't occur to me to invite Mr. Orme—he has his profession to attend to, and afternoon parties are not likely to have any attractions for him.'

Margot felt unable to press the point; probably he would not come even if he were asked. Fate was against her for the present.

Ida came up at this moment, put down the cup she had brought Margot, and looked over her shoulder. 'Hasn't Mr. Guy Hotham his profession to attend to, too, mother?' she inquired a little maliciously; 'you have asked him.'

'Mr. Hotham has not to depend upon it.'

'*I* think,' said Ida, 'that if you ask one, you ought to ask the other; they are living in the same house together, and won't it look a little pointed not to ask both?'

Ida did not often show so much interest in what was going on, and she was actuated now, not by any intuition of her sister's wishes, but by a suspicion that Guy Hotham would be more likely to present himself if he could be certain of not being the only male creature in the room.

Mrs. Chadwick, who always yielded to any suggestion of Ida's, did not think it worth while to oppose this one. 'Very well, my dear,' she said indolently; 'if you like to ask him, do so. I should be sorry to offend the dear Vicar.'

On the following afternoon, Orme was in his professional chambers in New Square, engaged in reading over a case that had just been brought in for his opinion, when the staircase outside resounded with a brisk but not very professional footstep, which was easy to recognise as Guy Hotham's. To assist that young gentleman in his studies for the Bar Examination, he had given him what is known as the run of his chambers,

though Guy usually preferred to run in any other direction.

Orme looked up smiling as the other burst in, for the two, in spite of the four years between them (often as great a barrier as a decade or so to a young fellow of Hotham's age), were on excellent terms.

'Hope you haven't hurried over your breakfast?' he said politely, with a glance at a little clock on his table which marked a quarter to five.

'Oh, I looked in for a few minutes at the Club on my way down. I haven't come to do any reading to-day.'

'You don't mean it!'

'You shut up. I've lots of time to mug up Snell and Williams between this and Christmas—it's not as if I meant to take up the thing seriously.'

'Well,' Orme admitted, 'it isn't much.'

'I only want to get called. The Governor thinks I ought to know a little law, in case I get made a magistrate some day. I say,' he broke off, beginning to turn over the bundles of papers on Orme's table, 'you *are* going it, old man. "Case for opinion of Counsel," "Mr. Nugent Orme—two guas!" "Mr. Nugent Orme, to settle draft statement of claim and advise generally." "Draft minutes." "Draft decree." "Brief—with you, Mr. Hallerby, Q.C." All these in since I was here last. You lucky old beggar! Why, I know no end of fellows who've never had a brief. I'm not interrupting you, am I?'

'Not a bit,' said Orme heartily, 'I was just going

to knock off.' It struck him that his young friend had some purpose in his visit, which he didn't quite know how to touch upon; there was something decidedly uneasy in his way of wandering about. 'Nothing wrong, is there?' he asked; 'anything you want to speak to me about?'

'Nothing, old boy; don't alarm yourself. By Jove, you've just reminded me,' said young Hotham, with an air of sudden recollection that was too artless to be quite genuine; 'I'd forgotten what it was I *did* come for—it was this'—here he produced a letter—'it came just after you had gone,' he exclaimed, with a reddening complexion, 'so I—er—thought it might be important—and I'd bring it up.'

Nugent took it, and the younger man stood watching his face while he read: apparently Guy was not consoled by what he saw.

'Thanks,' said Nugent, as he put the note in his pocket with a quiet satisfaction.

'It doesn't happen by any chance to be an invitation for Thursday afternoon, after the Drawing-room, does it?' said Hotham, unable to repress his curiosity.

'It does—why?'

'Nothing—only I thought you seemed rather pleased at it. I shouldn't have fancied afternoon parties were much in your line. Shall you go?'

'If I can manage it, very probably,' said Orme, who had every intention of going.

'She's asked me, too.'

'Miss Chevening has? Well, are *you* going?'

'Don't know—I may. I say, Orme, if anyone else had asked you, would you have gone?'

'You're confoundedly curious to-day, my dear fellow.'

'I know I am. I can't help it. Look here, Orme, I wish you would tell me something. I'd no idea of this till to-day. I thought she was beginning to—I didn't think she'd write to any other fellow!'

Orme raised his eyebrows. 'To ask him to come to an At Home—why the deuce shouldn't she?'

'It wasn't that—it was the way you looked when you read it. Orme, it—it's not a "case" with you, is it—you know what I mean?'

'I won't pretend I don't. If I said yes, what would it matter to you?'

'A lot,' said Hotham. 'I tell you what, I'm awfully gone on her, and where shall I be if you go in and cut me out?'

'I've not cut you out yet, and I'm not likely to,' said Orme, rather sadly; 'most people would back your chances.'

'Oh, I shall have the old place some day, when the old governor drops, and—and the title and all that. But what does a girl care for that!'

Privately Orme was of opinion that a girl cared a good deal, but he said nothing, and Hotham went on lugubriously, 'Anyway, I've nothing at present, while you—you're a clever chap, and no end of a swell at most things; you very nearly got your "blue" when you

were up, and I never got out of the "torpids," and you'll be making your fortune at the Bar before very long, and—and it's devilish hard after knowing her six months to find myself out of the running!'

'Doesn't it strike you as rather absurd for us two to be contending with one another in modesty like this on the strength of a note asking us to come to tea? Six months! I've known her for nearly three years, if you come to that.'

'But she couldn't have been more than sixteen then,' exclaimed Hotham.

'I should say she was about nineteen—not that it signifies.'

'Not signify!' cried Hotham. 'It strikes me it does. You've been speaking of the elder sister, Margot, all this time, haven't you?'

'Well?'

'Well, it's the younger one, Ida, *I* meant—but wasn't that letter from her, then?'

'Of course not!'

'I didn't know—I fancied—what funked me was your face when you read it, and all the time—by Jove, what an ass I've been!'

'What asses we've both been,' remarked Orme, a little annoyed that he had allowed his secret to escape him. 'You've got this out of me, Hotham, but for Heaven's sake don't imagine that this is anything but a onesided business—this note is an ordinary invitation. I'm nothing to her; it's as likely as not we don't meet a second time this season. I doubt if

her mother will give me many opportunities of seeing her.'

'You shall have your opportunities, though, all the same,' said Hotham. 'You've heard me speak of my aunt, Mrs. Antrobus? Tremendous trump: has a flat in Albert Hall Mansions. She'll do anything for me. Well, I told her all about Ida, you know, and got her to call on Mrs. Chadwick. And she took to Ida directly she saw her, and means to ask her to all her parties. She's always having a party of some kind—prefers 'em young and pretty. Well, of course she can't ask one sister without the other, and, don't you see? I'll take care you get a card for anything that's going. My aunt knows who you are; you've only to come with me and call some afternoon, and get the right side of the old lady, and it's your own fault if you don't get an innings sooner or later!'

'It's awfully good of you!' said Orme, who no longer regretted his indiscretion.

'Oh, now I know you're not my hated rival, I feel like a brother to you! We may be brothers some day, old fellow, if everything goes on right.'

Orme was afraid to reckon too confidently on the future; still, he felt that it looked brighter now than he had ever dared to hope. He would see Margot again very shortly; if Guy Hotham kept his word, it would not be his only chance of seeing her. And he had made up his mind that if he could see any sign that she was not wholly indifferent to him, he would speak to her of his hopes before the summer was over. There was no rea-

son why he should hold back any longer; his practice had increased considerably within the last year: he was already making a fair income for a man of his standing, and might look forward to marrying within the next year or two.

And yet, intensely as he longed for her, determined as he was to win her for his own, he was conscious all the time how little he really knew of her. He told himself that certain characteristics which had given him a dumb pain to witness long ago, signs of what, in any one else, he would have called heartlessness, had faded or been outlived. Had he not seen her conquering her prejudices? had she not shown herself in that softened, sweetly repentant mood? But it was not that which had made him love her first—his love was unreasoning, instinctive—he could not master it; but at the same time he had always a haunting perception that it might perhaps be better for him if he could.

## CHAPTER II

### A PARTIAL SOLUTION

Perhaps the smile and tender tone
Came out of her pitying womanhood.—*Maud.*

It might be thought that the addition of a single unit to the population of a mighty city would make no very perceptible difference to the appearance of its streets. Lovers know better. To Orme, London had seemed transformed ever since he had known of Miss Chevening's arrival. Born in the country and accustomed all his life to open air and exercise, the great city, with its dingy bricks and its second-hand atmosphere, generally oppressed his spirits and told on his health as it does with all but natives. But now a glamour had fallen upon the bustling streets, the Park and Gardens were full of delightful possibilities. Nothing was commonplace, no one uninteresting to him; his daily walk back from chambers was a romantic adventure; such social invitations as came in his way were accepted with a novel sense of excitement. For might not her face at any moment flash across him from the throng? Might not any carriage he saw approaching contain her? Was it not possible that he might find her amongst the company the very next evening he went out?

It seemed for some time that if he met her at all it would be in some such accidental way. He called, but they were not at home, and all his hopes of encountering her in public or private had so far been disappointed. The possibility was always there, however, and he kept up heart on that. Since the day on which Hotham had brought him her letter, his worst anxiety was removed; he would certainly see her once, and have the opportunity of speaking to her on this Thursday which was slowly approaching; he could wait more patiently in the meanwhile.

When the day came at last, he was engaged all day in court, as junior counsel in a complicated patent case. The duty of feeding a querulous leader with the appropriate diagrams, specifications, affidavits, and photographs at the right moment kept him effectually from thinking of more sentimental subjects, as the learned Q.C. addressed an interminable argument to the judge in his peevish, high-pitched voice, while the air of the court grew stuffier and heavier as the afternoon advanced. But when four o'clock came and the Court rose, what a deliverance it was to Orme to get out into the dim corridors, and how fervently he hoped as he crossed from the robing-room to his chambers that he would find no work requiring immediate consideration!

To his relief, there was nothing that could not stand over till next day, and he made his escape at once; it was too early to go to Hyde Park, but there was the inseparable black bag to be left at his rooms,

Hotham to be picked up, if he had not already gone, and then there were some slight changes in his toilet to be made before he could feel himself worthy to meet his lady's eyes. It must be a very strong-minded or self-confident lover who does not on such occasions regard his ordinary raiment with a distrustful and disparaging eye.

At last he and Hotham were on their way to the house opposite Hyde Park; the afternoon was raw and bleak, with a sullen leaden sky, and a vicious east wind that drove the fine dust in stinging showers and gave a pinched, blighted look to the faces in the street. But within the house, which was full of people, the feminine element being of course in a very decided majority, it was warm and cheerful enough. The Drawing-room party had not yet returned, so that Lettice enjoyed the unaccustomed dignity of acting as deputy hostess upstairs. Nugent remained below in the tea-room, where Hotham had introduced him to Mrs. Antrobus, a middle-aged lady of much vivacity. 'I've heard so much of you from my nephew,' she told him; 'such a good thing for him to be with some one a little older than himself! And I suppose you are really working at your profession. I've always said that poor dear Guy ought to have gone into the army, but his mother wouldn't hear of it, and of course he'll never be anything but a barrister in name, if he's that. I should be so thankful to see him settle down to something or some one, poor fellow! London's so full of temptations for a young man, Mr. Orme. Don't you think so?'

Orme said he thought she had no reason to be anxious on Hotham's account.

'You mustn't let him get into mischief if you can help it. He's behaving himself very well just now, I must say—if I could only believe he was in earnest. When are these girls coming back, I wonder? they'll be perished with the cold—such insanity to venture out on such a day as this! They're very late—more presentations than usual to-day, I suppose; I can't run away till I've seen how they look in their finery. Ah, here they are at last!'

Across the shaded lights and through the still unshrouded window Orme saw the carriage dash up in the waning light, with the coachman and footman wearing those bouquets which custom—heaven knows why—provides for their solace and refreshment on this particular occasion.

She was coming—he would see her now—and yet by one of those strange contradictions in the human mind, he felt none of the ecstasy he had expected—nothing but a suspense that was absolute pain.

As the two sisters entered, they were instantly rushed at by admiring girl-friends, pitying, exclaiming, questioning and comparing experiences, while Nugent had nothing to do but to stand apart, and watch Margot as she stood there, holding her long train and laughing and talking gaily.

She was looking radiant; her complexion had not suffered either from the cruel winds or the fatigue of the day; her loveliness was heightened rather than

overborne by the elaborate costume; the small ostrich feather gave a statelier air to her graceful head; he felt an almost personal pride in the sight of her, and yet his heart ached too. Could he reasonably expect this rare and exquisite being to link her existence with his? who was he that she should prefer him above all others? would it not be wiser to relinquish this dream once for all?

It might be, but he fully intended to persevere for all that; no pitiful self-distrust should hold him back from trying for the prize he had set his heart on; he knew that he had the power to make a position for her in time; he would take no dismissal but hers.

And just then she saw him, and her sweet eyes shone with the old frank pleasure. She was still his friend.

The room was thinning now, and he was able to come forward and speak to her.

'So you have actually come,' she said. 'I fancied you would probably despise such vanities.'

'I didn't know I was such a Diogenes as all that,' he answered.

'Oh, but it does seem an absurd practice, when you come to think of it, this solemn inviting of all one's friends to come and gaze on people for no better reason than that they have just been presented to their Sovereign. Confess that is what you have been thinking.'

'My conscience is quite clear.'

'You say that quite nicely; but it doesn't make me feel less barbaric all the same. And now do you think

you can get me a cup of coffee and something to eat. I can't possibly hold out any longer.'

So presently they were standing side by side before the usual long table, and he was delightfully occupied in ministering to her requirements. As they stood there, his eyes fell on one of the two neat maids in attendance, and he speculated idly in passing why it was that her face seemed familiar to him, though he not unnaturally failed to identify Susan with the termagant nursemaid at Trouville, who had been the means of first directing his attention to Miss Chevening. Susan knew him, however, though she stood there, demure and prim, as if her whole attention was concentrated on her duties.

Margot was describing her day's experiences. 'And the blocks were so tiresome,' she said; 'and the ugly common faces that came up and flattened themselves against the glass, gasping like the fish in an aquarium, only, unfortunately for us, they were not dumb. Some of the rougher people seemed quite injured at our having the insolence to go to court. I felt so inclined to tell them that I wished they were going instead of me, and that they would be more contented if they knew how fearfully uncomfortable we were inside!'

'I suppose it was all right when you were once at the palace.'

'Not at all. It was so cold in those corridors and antechambers, and the frightful responsibility of one's train—never wear a train, Mr. Orme,' she counselled him gravely in parenthesis. 'As for the ceremony, I

am very vague about it already. I remember our names being called out, and that I kissed the Queen's hand, and got through all my curtseying somehow without a mishap. I'd practised, you see. One girl that came after us was not so lucky, at least she came out in tears. I don't know what had happened to her, poor thing! I think she suddenly lost her head and bolted at the critical moment, and the Queen had her fetched back to do it properly. How wretched she must be feeling now, mustn't she? I should have been very disappointed if Her Majesty had not stayed until our turn came; there is nothing Republican about me. You are not a Radical, I hope?'

'It would evidently be rash to admit it just now if I were,' he said, 'but I should be very sorry to see our royalty represented by King Demos.'

'Should you? I am so glad,' she said; 'so should I. Fancy having to go to kiss *his* hand!' She made her pretty grimace at the idea. '*I* should run away then. But tell me what you have been doing since I saw you last; have you been working very hard, and addressing British juries—isn't that what you do?'

'Juries are not in my department,' he explained, 'but the other day I had to face three Lords Justices of Appeal, which was a fearful ordeal.'

'Really; why I met one of them out at dinner last week, and he was delightful—so amusing and pleasant!'

'They are not quite like that on the bench,' he said. 'I assure you I passed a most uncomfortable morning.

I made sure they were all against me; they put such tremendous posers, one after another.'

'Three against one doesn't sound very fair,' she said; 'and so, I suppose, you lost your—what do you call it—verdict? no, case.'

'Oh, I won my appeal,' he answered (he might have mentioned, had he chosen, that he had even been complimented from the bench on the ability he had shown), 'but won't you tell me about your own doings now?'

'There is so little to tell. Life in Gorsecombe is not exactly fertile in incident, as you know. The chief thing is sad, and that has happened since I have been away. Did you ever see Yarrow, my colley?—he is ill, and I'm very much afraid I shall never see him again.'

He could almost have wished himself her dog, to be spoken of in that tone of loving regret, to call that sudden shadow to her bright eyes. 'I haven't dared to tell Lettice yet,' she added, 'she will be heartbroken, she has always been his favourite. I shall never forget how wretched he was one day when she was quite small and he tripped her up by accident in playing with her, and hurt her knee. Nothing would content him but being allowed to come into her room, and he remained there with his head on the counterpane, trying to make her understand how grieved he was. I can't bear to think he may have to be killed.'

How he loved her for the feeling she showed—how doubly dear she seemed for this touch of tenderness and sympathy—and yet with her usual perversity she contrived to destroy the effect almost immediately.

There was a slight pause after she had spoken last and then Orme asked a question which caused her to become frigid and indifferent as if by some blighting spell.

'By the way,' he inquired, 'have you heard from your step-brother Allen lately?'

Somehow his former pupil had rather fallen out of his recollection of late, as persons do who take no means of recalling themselves to our minds; in his visits to Gorsecombe he had not chanced to hear the result of the indigo-planting scheme, and he asked about Allen now with a sense of shame at his own forgetfulness.

'From Allen?' she said carelessly—too carelessly almost; 'oh, no, he does not write to me, you know.'

'But his father has had news of him, I suppose?' said Orme. 'I hope he is doing well out in India?'

Oh, I believe so. I—I really do not know exactly. Shall we go upstairs now?'

He saw that she did not mean to pursue the subject; indeed the mention of that name had raised a sudden constraint between them; she led the way to the drawing-room and he followed, but no more was said on either side.

Once more he had to be content with looking on, for Miss Chevening was instantly surrounded as before. Lady Yaverland, who had presented her nieces, was upstairs with the Miss Bradings, whose first Drawing-room dated from a season further back than they cared to remember, and poor Lord Yaverland, conscious of not appearing to advantage in white knee-breeches and

stockings (he had once filled a minor post in a short-lived Administration), kept himself and his fringed cocked-hat as much in the background as possible and looked acutely miserable.

Guy Hotham was hovering about Ida, and though there were several people in the room Orme knew, he did not feel inclined to make any further conversational openings just then.

But presently Lettice came up and shook hands with him. 'I wonder how the Queen holds her Drawing-room?' she remarked. 'Should you think she walked about and talked to all the people just as mother is doing now? I should like to talk to the Queen—wouldn't you?'

Nugent feared he might have a difficulty in finding something to talk to her about.

'I shouldn't,' said Lettice; 'there's quite a lot of things I should like to ask her.'

'I believe it isn't considered proper to ask Royalty questions.'

'Oh, but I should ask only polite ones; and I should tell her she needn't answer unless she liked. That wasn't what I came to talk to you about, though; there's something I want to know so dreadfully, but I can't ask you here. Would you mind coming down into the conservatory, where no one will hear us?'

Orme followed her obediently outside and down a few steps to a small tiled alcove hung with Persian tapestries.

'You were Allen's tutor once, weren't you?' began Lettice, 'long ago—before *we* knew him.'

'Yes,' said Nugent; 'for a short time I was.'

'He liked you,' she said; 'he often told me so. And what I want you to tell me is, if he has ever written to you to say what has become of him, and how he is. I do want to know so very much!'

'He has not written to me, Lettice,' said Orme, 'but won't your sister tell you all you want to know—or Mr. Chadwick?'

'Margot never likes talking about him,' said Lettice, 'not even here. And I daren't ask papa. I should be sent to school if I mentioned Allen's name even; he said so. It's so dreadful, though, to think of poor Allen wandering about with no one to care about him, and no home to come back to!'

Orme started. 'What do you mean, Lettice?—wandering about—and no home to come back to? I thought Allen was settled in India, and doing well!'

'Oh, no!' she said sadly, 'we don't know where he is. I don't believe anybody at home cares except me. And you haven't heard—you can't tell me about him?'

'I wish I could,' he said, with a painful sense of bewilderment; 'but—but all this is new to me. I have been taking it for granted that he was all right.'

'I'm sorry,' said Lettice, with a little sigh. 'I suppose we had better go back again now—you don't mind my bringing you down here all for nothing, do you?'

Orme returned to the drawing-room, where the

people were beginning to make a move. Mrs. Antrobus stopped in passing to give him the invitation to come and see her, which would have meant so much to him a short time ago. Just then it seemed a mockery; for it was, perhaps, pardonable in him that Lettice's revelation should affect him most powerfully in connection with Margot. He had believed her to be frankness itself; he had hoped that she put some confidence in him, and yet she knew that Allen was an outcast and a wanderer upon the face of the earth, and she had suppressed this knowledge, had answered smoothly, carelessly, as if—though it concerned her not—all were well with him!

And, such is the egotism of a lover, it was the attempt at concealment, the withdrawal of confidence in relation to himself, that struck him most painfully, coming near to disenchanting him for the moment. The deception seemed so wanton, so cynically reckless, that he was staggered.

He felt unable to stay there; the sight of her, all loveliness and animation, oppressed him now, and yet he could not go without taking leave of her. He joined her as she stood at one of the windows, looking out on the blue-grey dusk and the lines of lighted lamps across the Park: 'Good-bye, Miss Chevening,' he said.

She turned to him. 'Are you going?' she said, and then her *nonchalance* left her. 'Don't go just yet. There is something I want to tell you first—about Allen,' she added.

He held his breath; if he could have spoken he would have tried to prevent her—he was in terror of some further insincerity.

'I left you to suppose downstairs,' she began, in a rapid, breathless manner, with a glance back into the room beyond to make sure that she was not overheard, 'I let you suppose that there was nothing to tell about him. There was a great deal—only,' and she smiled faintly, 'when there are two maidservants on the other side of a table listening with all their ears, it is not *quite* the most convenient time for unlocking the family skeleton.'

He felt his doubts giving way with every word she spoke—in what a hurry he had been to judge her! 'It was indiscreet of me to ask as I did,' he admitted; 'I ought to have known better.'

'Oh, I don't know—how were you to anticipate? Even I—but I had better tell you. My unhappy step-brother has destroyed his last chance: he never even gave the indigo factory a trial—he ran away on the voyage out, and his father has refused to have anything more to do with him. We have heard nothing since. Now you know all that there is to know,' she concluded.

He drew a deep breath of relief; his chief sensation was an intense thankfulness that she had told him this herself, and shown his suspicions of her candour to be so monstrously unjust. In the revulsion of feeling he was not inclined to dwell, as he might have done at some other time, upon the tone in which her announcement was made.

'I had hoped for better news,' he said gravely; 'I am more sorry than I can say.'

Orme was sincerely sorry, and yet, to himself, the words sounded hollow and conventional—for it was not of Allen that he was thinking most just then.

'I knew you would be,' she said; 'you always had a great belief in him.'

'I don't understand it,' he answered slowly; 'it seems so strange that he should have thrown up a plan without a trial—when it was his own idea—after persuading you to obtain his father's consent. What do you suppose his object could have been?'

'I have not tried to suppose,' she replied, 'and, Mr. Orme, you will understand, I am sure, that after what has happened, it is—is not a very pleasant subject to me. It would be a great relief for me to feel that it is not to be revived between us again. He has chosen to cut himself adrift from us all. It can do no possible good to be for ever discussing the whole miserable business over and over again, whenever we meet—*can* it?' She said this with a certain feverish impetuosity, an evident weariness of the subject.

'I suppose not,' he agreed; 'I will not distress you like this again, Miss Chevening.'

'You will not?—thank you so much! Is it very hard-hearted of me to say this? I can't help it, and you must not suppose that I am not sorry for him, or that I don't think of all this sometimes, and wish it could have been different—only I *hate* talking about it so—you do understand, don't you?'

A man must have been much less in love than Orme was to resist her just then, so winningly did she make that appeal, so wistfully anxious was she to retain his good opinion.

He went away more subjugated than ever. If the contrast between her, in her luxury and gaiety, and her step-brother, the son of the house, in exile no one knew where, struck his imagination, he did not reproach her in his thoughts. She was not responsible for it; he believed that her heart was more touched by it than she chose to acknowledge.

And if he could have wished to see more signs of this, if she was really incapable of feeling all the compassion for Allen that might be wished, were there not many excuses for her? Was it not to her credit that she made no pretences?

So he argued with himself—and never had he been more easy to convince.

## CHAPTER III

### WARNED

Can I part her from herself, and love her, as I knew her, kind?
*Locksley Hall.*

WHITSUNTIDE had come, and Nugent Orme was spending it at the Vicarage. This time one powerful element of attraction was wanting, for Miss Chevening was not in Gorsecombe. But she was not in town either, as he happened to know, for Mrs. Chadwick and her two eldest daughters were away on a short visit, so that Orme's appreciation of home life was not troubled by thoughts of any sacrifices entailed. Thanks, too, to Guy Hotham and Mrs. Antrobus, he now enjoyed frequent opportunities of seeing Margot Chevening, and every meeting since the afternoon of the Drawing-room had left him more deeply in love, more determined to speak to her at the first propitious moment. The moment had not come as yet; indeed of late her former frank friendliness had given place to a constraint, almost a coldness, which he took as a discouraging symptom.

Here in the peaceful Vicarage he found a temporary relief from the distracting alternations of hope and despair he had been going through, in addition to the

heavy work of his profession during the past term. His mind was as full of her as ever, but insensibly his thoughts took a more hopeful cast.

More than once he felt tempted to confide in Millicent, in order to find out how his prospects looked in her eyes, but he could not bring himself to do so. It not unfrequently happens that a man's sister is the person whom he finds it most difficult to consult in matters of the heart. A sister is apt occasionally to see her brother's tender passion in a frivolous or even a comic light, especially when she happens to be acquainted with the object of it. Not that Millicent was a girl to do this, or that Orme feared any want of sympathy on her part; there had always been a complete understanding between them, in spite of the difference in their characters.

But a feeling he could not account for made him guard his secret even from her for some days after his arrival, and then it was Millicent who first approached the subject.

It was a lovely evening in early June, and they were pacing the lawn together after dinner, as the first star came softly out in the apple-green sky over the common, and a sad, subdued tone deadened without confusing all the form and colour around them.

'I forgot to ask you whether you saw Mr. Chadwick when you went up there this afternoon?' said Millicent.

'Oh, yes, he was at home,' he answered; 'he struck me as having altered, Millie; he talked rather wildly once or twice. Does he drink, do you know?'

'They say so,' she admitted rather reluctantly. 'He never goes anywhere now. But what made you go and call upon him? I did not know you were particularly fond of him.'

'I'm not, and I felt less fond of him than ever this afternoon; he did nothing but abuse fashion and extravagance and women, and was altogether so incoherent and generally unpleasant that I was glad to get away.'

'But why did you go to see him at all, dear?—it wasn't at all necessary, surely.'

'Oh!' said Orme, 'I went to get some pieces of music Miss Chevening asked me to find for her.'

To his sister's fine ear he betrayed himself by the almost imperceptible lingering over the surname, as if he found (as he did) a subtle pleasure in merely pronouncing it.

'Then you have seen Margot lately—often, Nugent?'

'Pretty often—yes,' he replied; he was not unwilling to speak of her just then, he was almost ready to pour all his doubts and fears, his hope and ambition, into Millicent's ear; it was the place and hour for such confidences. 'Why do you ask?' he added.

'I was wondering,' said Millicent, as she halted in the deeper dusk under the great cedar. 'Will you tell me something if I ask you?' she continued after a pause. 'I used to fancy you would come to me first, if you—had news. Is there anything between you and Margot?'

'No, Millie, not yet.'

'I am so glad!' she said; 'I was afraid it was too late to speak.'

'Why should you be afraid? Millie, you know her; is there some one else—some one about here?—I must know if there is.'

'No—no, not that I have heard of—it isn't that, Nugent.'

'Then I don't care,' he said.

'You have really fallen in love with her?' she asked anxiously; 'is it serious, Nugent?'

'As serious as it can be,' he said; 'you seem to have a very poor opinion of my prospects, Millie.'

'Nugent, believe me it will be better for you to forget her if you can—you will be happier in the end!'

'Excellent advice, but not very practical, Millicent. I *can't* forget her; I don't want happiness if that's to be the price of it. I may have no chance, as you seem to think, but I'm not exactly going to give up in advance.'

'Tell me why you love her—because she is beautiful, or because you believe she is good?'

'What questions! I love her because she is herself—that is enough for me, Millicent.'

'But if you were mistaken in her, if she were not what you think her?—oh, I know I shall make you angry with me—but indeed, indeed she is not worthy of you; she is not—not good, Nugent!'

'And this is your idea of friendship!' he cried scornfully.

'I was her friend once—not now. Dear Nugent,

be patient with me. I would not speak now if it were too late to be of any use. But I cannot stand by and let my only brother throw his heart away like this—I cannot. I want to save you from doing what you will repent of some day. No—wait, listen. I know how sweet she can be, how lovely she is to look at. There was a time when I should have been glad to have her for my sister. That was before I knew how cruel she really was, how merciless she can be under all that sweetness.'

Hideous doubts, reviving and clutching his heart as he listened, kept him a listener still.

'What have you to say against her?' he said; 'let us have it out.'

'You cannot know the part she took in sending that poor step-brother of hers away!'

'I do know it,' he said; 'I know that in what she did she was anxious only for his benefit. He represented that he was longing to go out and shift for himself on this Bengal plantation—he begged her to help him and get his father's consent. She did. Was it her fault that it turned out badly or that his fancy did not last, or was a sham to start with? She disliked him, I know; she owned it from the first; but then, at least, she was honestly trying to do her best for him; and you make that a reproach against her! As if she can be made responsible for results no one could foresee at the time. Do you call that religion and charity?'

'Did *she* tell you that he was anxious to go out? It is not true, Nugent. Listen to me—you must. I

never meant to let this pass my lips, but you are more to me than she is, and I must say what I know. Allen Chadwick did *not* want to go. So far from that, he begged and prayed to stay at home, and it was Margot —for what reason I don't know—who was allowed to decide whether he should be sent away or not. She insisted, in spite of his entreaties, that he must go. She and no one else is to blame for all that followed.

'That is enough, Millicent,' he interrupted roughly; 'do you suppose I can't see what it is that embitters you against her? You can't forgive her for being beautiful. If you were able to judge fairly, you would not condescend to repeat this silly village gossip—you would feel as I feel, that it disproves itself!'

'Nugent,' said Millicent gravely, 'it is not village gossip. Be more just to me; should I tell you all this unless I knew it to be true? Poor Allen Chadwick told me himself how he dreaded the idea of being sent away; the last time I met him he was more hopeful—it was left to Margot to decide. The next thing I heard was that he had gone. I taxed Margot with it—and, Nugent, she admitted everything! She knew how reluctant he was to go out and how unlikely to prosper there, but she wished to be relieved of him and decided for his being banished. She did not even seem to see that she had done anything to be ashamed of. He was in England still at the time, and I implored her to get him recalled even then; I pointed out that he would almost certainly be driven to despair and ruin—but she would not yield. Nugent, can you hear that a girl

you love has done this and not feel some change towards her? If you can, it is a beautiful face and nothing else that you love, and such love as that must end in certain misery.'

Nugent sat down on the bench under the cedar and covered his face. Millicent's words, spoken without animus, with such intense earnestness, dropped conviction into his soul like a corrosive acid.

It was impossible to disbelieve her, strive as he might. Various circumstances which had puzzled and pained him at the time came back now with terrible corroborative force; for the first time he saw their significance. Those indications of remorse on Margot's part, which he had thought the effect of a generous heart and an over-sensitive conscience, were miserably inadequate for such a wrong as hers.

He no longer wondered that she should have attempted to keep him in ignorance of what had become of Allen, or that she should order the subject to be dropped between them in future.

The revolution this wrought in his conceptions of her can hardly be over-stated. He had seen, of course, and not without a certain comprehension, her strong antipathy to Allen. But he had pictured her as overcoming it, setting herself to see and encourage what was good in him, acting as his confidante and ally in carrying out his rash project of trying his fortune in India; she had seemed the more lovable and sweet for this condescension.

And all that, it seemed, had never been! He had

been deluded by his love and by her own skill in distorting facts. The project was hers—not Allen's: what she had done was only in furtherance of her own selfish aims; she had forced him into exile, careless what became of him so long as she gained her end; she had done this in spite of entreaties and reproaches, in the full knowledge of what must follow. And now, when the natural end had come, and this poor, unloved, unoffending Allen was swallowed up by the quicksand into which her hand had thrust him, she looked as sweet and fair and innocent as ever; her laugh was as true, her gaiety as real, as if no thought of what she had done ever seriously troubled her peace!

The girl whose heart all his hopes had long been set on winning was capable, then, of such cruelty and callousness as this? Would his love survive this disenchantment? Had it already received its deathblow? His brain was too bruised and stunned as yet for any self-examination of this sort.

For anything he could tell, he might be unable to conquer his love for her, in spite of everything; but all that was best and highest in that love would have departed from it for ever. Already he foresaw the misery of a passion which judgment condemned!

He sat there silent so long that Millicent could not forbear from some expression of compassion. 'Poor boy,' she said, laying her hand upon his shoulder, 'I know how hard it is for you, but isn't it better to know this now than afterwards—when it might be too late?'

He shook off her hand impatiently. 'For God's

sake, don't try to console me,' he said; 'I'm not in the mood to stand that just yet!'

'I only want to be quite sure that you are not angry with me, dear,' she pleaded; 'and—and, Nugent, you won't go on caring for her after this, will you?'

She was too anxious to discover the precise effect of what she had told him to exercise the little tact she possessed.

'How do I know?' he said, looking up with a white face. 'One doesn't get over these things all at once, Millicent.'

'But you do believe what I say?' she persisted; 'you will not take her word against mine?'

Till that moment it had not occurred to him to dispute the substantial accuracy of her account, but her injudicious insistence had the effect she least intended.

'You may be perfectly right,' he said, 'but why should you be afraid of my asking her for her version?'

'Oh, Nugent,' she cried, 'don't do that; be content with mine. Try not to see her again; it is wiser, believe me!'

'Wise or foolish, I *shall* see her again. I shall ask her myself about this. I will not judge her without knowing more than I do now. I don't doubt what you have told me, but—but there may be other circumstances which you have not heard of, which would explain everything.'

'She will persuade you so, no doubt,' said Millicent bitterly.

'She is not likely to care to take the trouble,' he

replied; 'you will probably have the satisfaction of separating us, whatever the real facts may be. You have not wasted your evening, Millicent.'

'Ah, Nugent,' she said tearfully, 'don't speak like that to me; have I any other object but your happiness?'

He was too sore to be just or rational just then.

'If that is so,' he retorted, 'I'm afraid your efforts are a little unfortunate. You had better go in now—the mother has come to the window to look for us.'

'Are you coming in too, Nugent?'

'You think a cup of tea will be a remedy? No, thank you, Millicent. I'm better left alone just now. Go—and for heaven's sake don't let them see you've been crying!'

He turned abruptly down the path to the garden gate and out upon the road, leaving Millicent to make what excuses she could for him. 'I thought you were never coming in,' said Mrs. Orme; 'what have you and Nugent been gossiping about all this time?'

'Oh, I don't know,' said Millicent vacantly, 'there were so many things to talk about. May I put the shade on that lamp, dear?—it dazzles my eyes so.'

Meanwhile Nugent was hurrying aimlessly on through the warm dark night. As he set out, the upper windows in the village street were gleaming yellow under their black gables. When he passed them again on his return, they reflected the livid grey green of a new dawn, and the air had grown chill, and the birds in the Vicarage garden were beginning to utter their first sleepy and tentative chirps.

Where he had been in the meantime he hardly knew, beyond a vague impression of striding on along the grey high road, under black arching elms, past woods faint with wild hyacinths, through shuttered villages, his mind the whole time painfully striving with the problem of his future relations with Margot.

If what he had heard was true, it was impossible that he could ever think of her in the same way again. *Was* it true? The longer he thought of it the greater grew the improbability that Millicent could have invented or been seriously mistaken in her facts.

He had declared that he would appeal to Margot herself, but in his cooler state he began to see how difficult this would be—how unlikely to end in any satisfactory solution. She had already forbidden the subject: she would probably refuse to admit his right to reopen it.

Even if she denied the charge ever so indignantly and haughtily, would he believe her? He knew in his heart that he would not.

And with all this, he felt that his love was not killed; in the midst of his fiercest indignation her vivid face came before him like a challenge to turn away from her and forget her if he could. He despised himself for this bondage of the reason to the senses, but he was powerless to effect his liberty.

There was even a time in the course of that night's walk in which he felt the temptation to do and say nothing, to acquiesce in the lowering of his ideal and shut his eyes to all that would revolt him in any

other person. What if she were unscrupulous, selfish, pitiless to another—was he so immaculate himself as to condemn her? What mattered anything so long as he could gain her love? Why should he make Allen's cause his own, now that he could do him no good by it?

But this mood did not last. Some men might have taken this cynical view and acted upon it—but not Orme. His detestation of conduct such as he believed hers to have been was too thorough; he would have pardoned almost anything else—certainly any wrong to himself—but he felt it would be weakness here—weakness that would bring its own punishment.

And yet, if they met, if he were again under the spell of her eyes and her voice, could he be sure of his power to resist? No, he decided; he might yield, if she chose to persuade him, but he had strength at least to keep out of temptation. He would avoid her, he would go nowhere where he had any reason to expect to find her. Should he meet her, it would be in some crowd where nothing but ordinary civilities would be required of him. It was not an heroic course, but it was better than an ignominious surrender.

With this resolution, wrung from him after a long and wearying struggle, he came home with a feeling that the crisis had passed.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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